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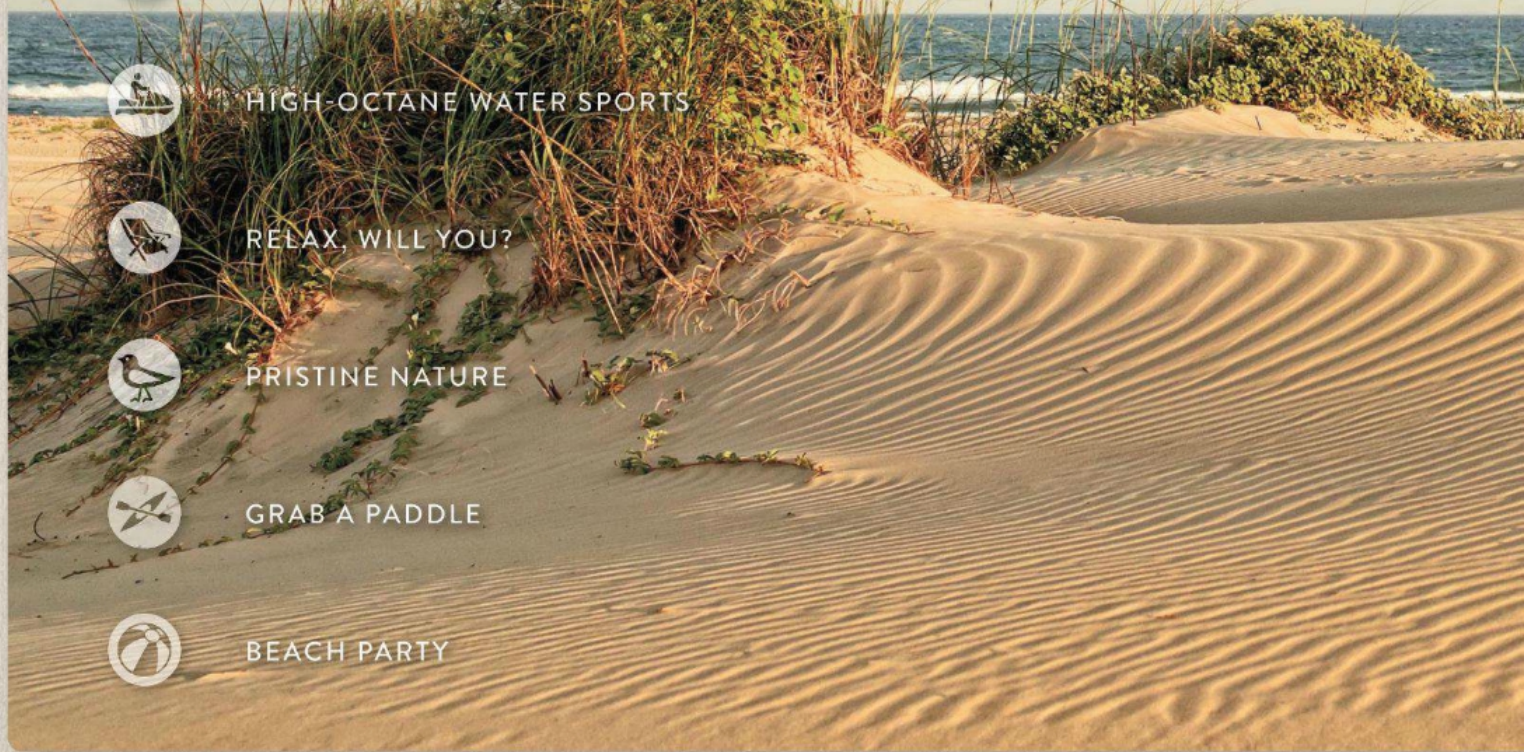
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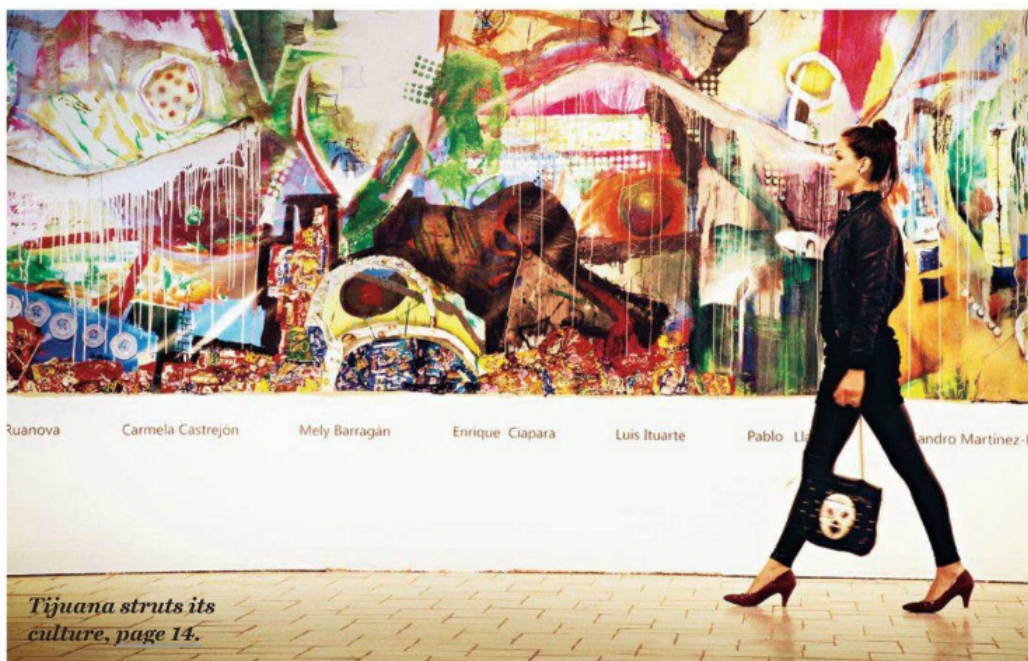
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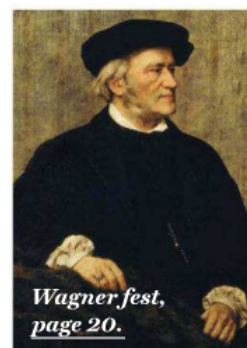
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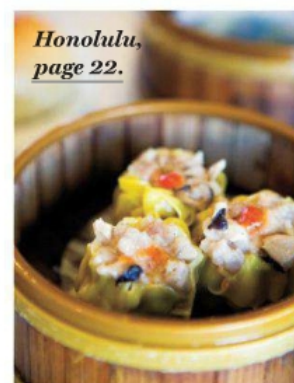
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ON THE COVER: PENGUINS ON SOUTH GEORGIA ISLAND, BY MOMATIUK-EASTCOTT/CORBIS

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[EDITOR'S NOTE]

Toronto Turnaround

WHEN I WAS A KID, I LIVED on a sprawling farm out on Finch Avenue, miles from what is now downtown Toronto. Any rural charm that Finch had then for the boy who grew up exploring its creeks and forests is long gone, buried under concrete. The Toronto I rediscovered in my late teens was a dreary place that closed too early and had yet to give us the comic genius of Second City's Martin Short, John Candy, and Rick Moranis and the kinetic sizzle of the Toronto International Film Festival. Montreal was the edgy, sophisticated city. As my friend, Montreal-based cartoonist Terry Mosher, said: "Toronto is to Montreal what a frog is to a princess."

I still have family near Toronto, and I made the city my briefest of stops en route to points elsewhere—until 2011, when I interviewed American urban theorist Richard Florida, author of the influential 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Now a professor at the University of Toronto, he offered a fresh perspective on Ontario's capital, which he termed a Frost Belt city. "Many American Frost Belt cities have been devastated by decline. But Toronto has not only remade itself; it has been able to thrive." Florida points to a number of reasons for this, including families living right in the city—and what may be "the largest population of foreign-born people of any city in North America, showing us how to, almost marvelously, handle immigration and build what Canadians call a mosaic rather than a melting pot." In the past few years I have come to love this town I once snickered at. I now submit that TO, in the local argot, is one of North America's greatest cities—an assertion that you'll find validated on page 48 by Toronto-based novelist Katrina Onstad, who shares with us the discoveries, insights, and recommendations of five members of Toronto's creative class. —KEITH BELLOWES

[FOREIGN DESK]

LONDON LOWDOWN

London's famed Chelsea Flower Show turns one hundred this year, so we asked Pat Riddell, editor of our U.K. edition, for his take on that and other London highlights.

FLOWER POWER

The Chelsea Flower Show celebrates its centennial May 21–25 with gardens by top international designers. This year the show highlights sustainable living and the preservation of Britain's horticultural heritage. If you manage to snag a ticket, take time to chat with the exhibitors, who are keen to discuss their specialties.

FREEWHEELING

Rent a "Boris Bike"—named after London Mayor Boris Johnson, who introduced them—for a ride along the Regent's Canal. An eight-mile route runs from Limehouse to Paddington and passes such attractions as the London Zoo and Regent's Park.

ARTS & CULTURE

For a glimpse of 19th-century London, visit Sir John Soane's Museum, once the home of Soane, a leading architect. Filled with antiquities and art, it includes a library with more than 7,000 volumes.



SMALL FRY

Of the many cuisines on offer in London, Vietnamese is among the most popular. Enjoy everything from refined *pho* to rough-and-ready *banh mi* around the nightlife hubs of Shoreditch and Hoxton. One of the best spots is **Cây Tre** restaurant [above], for such dishes as the grilled fish *cha ca la vong* and beef *pho*.



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Merlion Park, Singapore.

Singapore Slinging

SINGAPORE HAS LONG captivated contributing editor P. F. Kluge, and his February/March 2013 feature, "Singapore Fling," had a similar effect on readers. "I was born in Singapore, and it is wonderful to see an American get to the essence of the island country—the place, the people, and, most of all, the food," wrote Stewart Shang of **Los Angeles, Calif.** Cheryl Surbaugh of **Sister Bay, Wis.,** also praised the piece, albeit with one caveat: "The article enticed me to want to visit Singapore, which I have never wanted to do. However, I found the writer's disparaging remarks about Ohio [where, incidentally, Kluge lives] unnecessary. Of course Ohio is not Singapore, but it is home to interesting, kind people."

CAFFEINE HIGH Daisann McLane's column about coffee and tea (Real Travel, February/March 2013) resonated with 18-year-old Jasmine Joy of **Queensland, Australia:** "While traveling around Chiang Mai, Thailand, I found myself in a tree house in a traditional Karen village,

with a funeral for an elder taking place. We sat cross-legged in meditative silence, chewing tea leaves wrapped around wedges of rock salt. Sharing the tea brought the community together in their grief, while the caffeine provided endurance for a long night of remembrance."

FRENCH TOAST "Paris Pastimes" (Family Time, December 2012/January 2013) offered ten ways to keep up kids' joie de vivre around the Louvre. Mom and blogger Monique Rubin, based in **The Hague, Netherlands,** had more Paris family favorites to suggest: "Go to the top of the Arc de Triomphe and to the wonderfully old-fashioned amusement park Jardin d'Acclimation."

CABIN FEVER A photo of an Appalachian cabin in "Radio Days" (February/March 2013) surprised Cathy Blackwell Stollings of **Jenison, Mich.:** "That was my grandmother's log cabin, built in the 1700s. I spent summers there, and if I close my eyes, I can smell the wonderful aroma of bacon cooking on the old black wood stove. My mother, who is 75, hasn't been back to Kentucky in years; this spring my brother and I are taking her."

ALL ABOARD "A Desire Named Streetcar" (February/March 2013) tracked North America's streetcar revival. Onetime Australia resident Raymond Beckhurst, now of **Calgary, Alberta,** wrote: "In the 1950s, while many cities ripped out trams, Melbourne expanded its system. Today 29 routes crisscross the city and suburbs. It seems to have taken America a century to catch up with the Aussies."

ANCHORS AWEIGH After featuring six small European harbor gems ("Ports of Call," February/March 2013), we asked our digital community to share their favorite ports. Responses ranged from **Porto, Portugal,** and **Khíos, Greece,** to **Galveston, Texas.**

NEXT QUESTION: *What travel frontiers do you dream of exploring? E-mail responses to travel_talk@ngs.org.*

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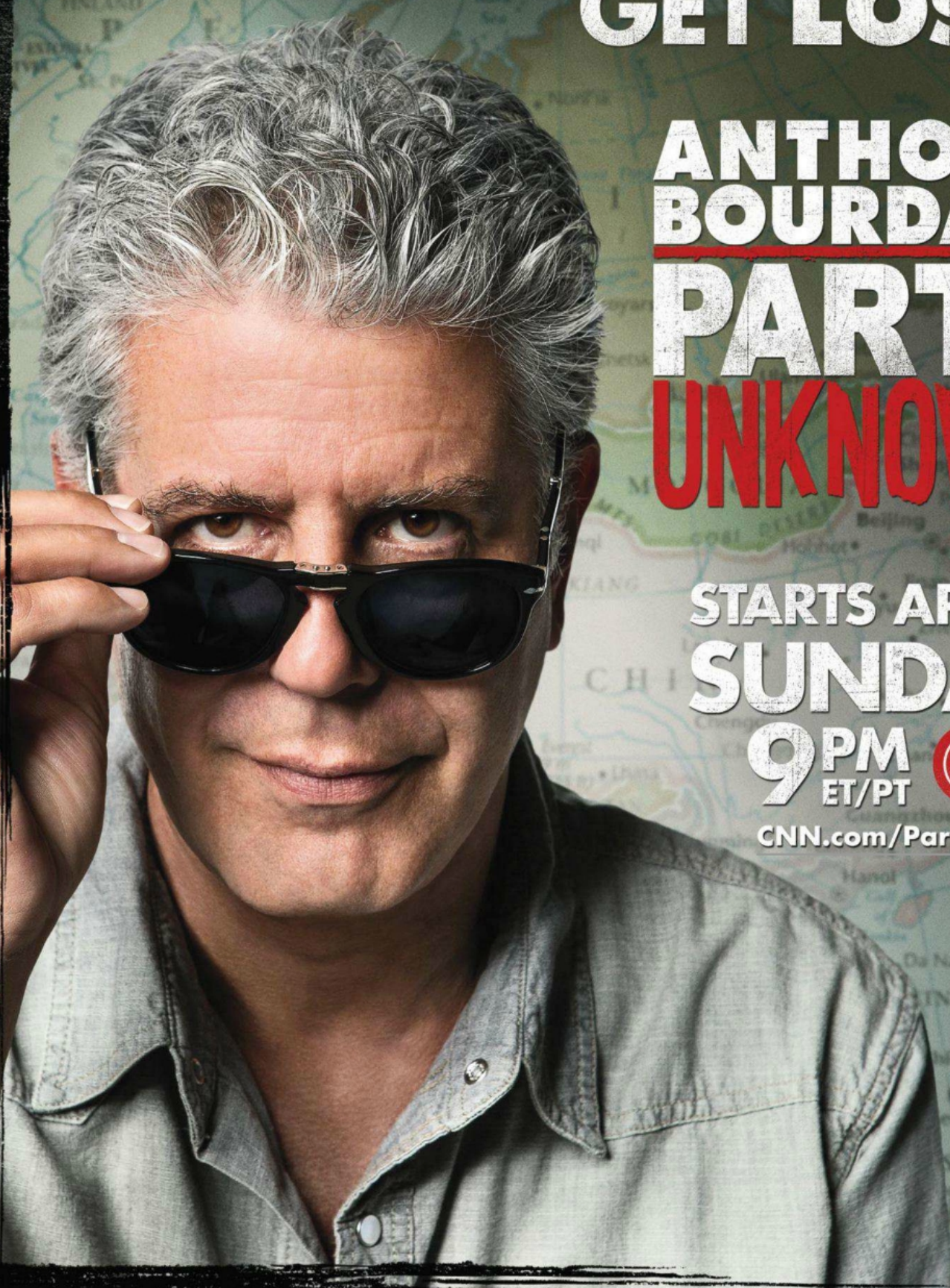
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THE PLACE

Greek Rock Star

FOR YEARS, traveling to the fortified Greek village of **Monemvasia** (literally “single entrance”) required a cumbersome drive from Athens to an imposing rock jutting off the tip of the Peloponnese Peninsula. “It’s a bit of a scandal for a former naval city not to have good transport by sea,” says historian Haris Kalligas. Now a resurrected ferry service from Athens’s port of Piraeus is signaling a new era of smooth sailing in a country fretted by troubled economic waters. Founded by sixth-century Spartans fleeing invaders, the “Gibraltar of the East” (as it’s sometimes called) makes an authentic refuge. ¶ Access isn’t the only bright spot. Visitors meander narrow cobblestoned streets around a main square and church, where a significant Byzantine icon of Christ’s Crucifixion, stolen 30 years ago, was recently returned. During Orthodox Easter, on May 5 this year, residents burn a mock Judas in effigy. And in the deserted upper town, a trail leads hikers past ancient ruins, including Agia Sofia, a rare octagonal church. Some 600 feet below the rock’s formidable peak, swimmers in the sparkling turquoise Myrtoan Sea find another highlight: the view up. —KELLY DINARDO

The 12th-century Agia Sofia church remains a lookout for Monemvasia.

A close-up portrait of Anthony Bourdain, a man with grey hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark sunglasses. He is holding the left side of his sunglasses with his right hand, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a map of the world, showing parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

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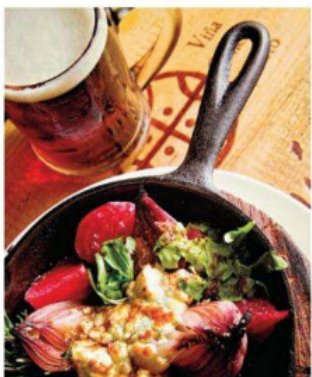
THE COMEBACK

Tijuana, Remixed

UNTIL RECENTLY Tijuana, Mexico, was best left to kids looking for trouble. But a blossoming cultural scene is helping the busy borderland 17 miles south of San Diego turn a sophisticated corner.

La Casa del Túnel—named for an illicit tunnel that was once underneath—now traffics in contemporary art, and galleries along the subterranean Pasaje Gómez beckon visitors off main drag Avenida Revolución. “TJ” still breaks a few rules—at sizzling restaurants innovating “Baja-Med” fusion, such as Misión 19 (an Anthony Bourdain pick), El Taller, and La Querencia, with specials like seared beef tongue with chipotle cream. Then there are octopus tacos at the Kokopelli street stand and 30-plus Mexican brews at BCB Tasting Room (just don’t ask for a Corona).

On a Turista Libre tour aboard a school bus departing from the Mexican side of the border, day-trippers discover many layers of “beautifully bizarre” Tijuana (in the words of guide Derrik Chinn). At Playas, the U.S.-Mexico fence plunges into the Pacific—a photo op as well as a reminder of the constant exchange of people and ideas in this land where cultures meet. —David Swanson



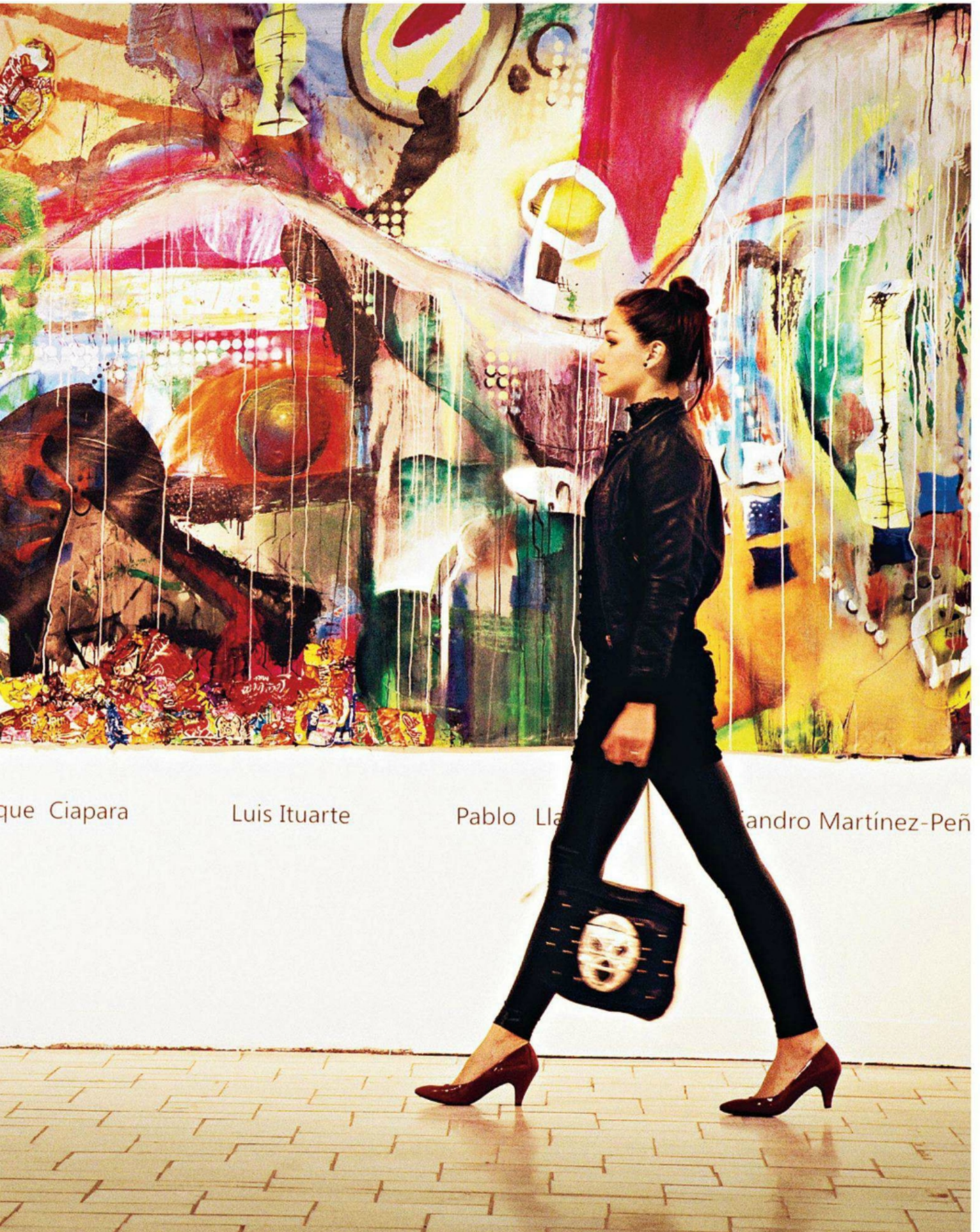
ova

Carmela Castrejón

Mely Barragán

Enri

Taste-spolling: art at the Institute of Culture of Baja California; “Baja-Med” fare at El Taller (left).



que Ciapara

Luis Ituarte

Pablo Lla

andro Martínez-Peñ

FRIETZ TORRES CARBILLO (ART.), LEÓN FELIPE CHARGOVY (FOOD)

THE CAUSE

A Bear of a Problem

REPORTEDLY WORTH MORE than a billion in annual tourism dollars, **the koala bear has slipped off balance** in its native habitat along Australia's east coast. The marsupial shows "clear evidence of broad decline," says Peter Menkhorst, a koala ecologist in Victoria. Deforestation and drier, hotter weather have contributed to shrinking counts in Queensland and New South Wales, recently moving the Australian government to classify the species "vulnerable" in those urbanizing states. Meanwhile, west of Melbourne along the Great Ocean Road, cramped reserves teem with koalas; at Cape Otway, as many as a dozen curl up in a single tree. ¶ Photo ops are a given at Gold Coast's Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, but Menkhorst advises observing the creatures in wild eucalyptus forests, such as in cooler southeastern Australia, where numbers are stable. Travelers can support reforestation efforts through the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Greening Australia. —JONATHAN B. TOURTELLOTT

Koalas perch in eucalyptus trees, their only source of food.

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THE PERSON

Bing the Builder

SHOWSTOPPING and sustainable, fashionable and even radical—**Bing Thom's** architecture pushes the limits. In Surrey, a once bleak suburb of Vancouver, Thom took the roof off a shopping mall and plopped down a university (a novel play on “higher learning”). Along Washington, D.C.’s resurgent southwest waterfront, he added a new venue to Arena Stage’s two historic theaters (opened in 1961 and ’71) and encased all three in undulating glass, supported by Douglas fir columns and topped with a cantilevered roof. A Vancouverite by way of Hong Kong, Thom pioneers design often called regenerative urbanism—or, as he says, architecture that inspires people to rethink community space.

How can architecture affect travelers? By putting things, or people, together that aren’t expected, to break down preconceptions. I purposely create accidental collisions within my buildings.

How do you approach a project in a new place? I immerse myself in the culture. I walk the streets and talk to people. As the expression goes, you can’t smell the flower sitting on a horse. I like to feel the grain of a city.

What have you learned working in different cities? Every place has its own sense of color. Vancouver is shades of gray because of the rain and mist, and it’s a city for drop-outs—philosophers, inventors, artists. The crispness of light in Washington, D.C., makes everything more black and white; you make decisions and move faster. Hong Kong is grittier; it’s so dense, you



Architect Bing Thom basks alongside one of his masterpieces: Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.

have to go to extremes to get noticed. The differences force me to adapt.

What kind of a traveler are you? I sit on a park bench or on a ferry and talk to people. Once a year I travel like a backpacker, anonymously and alone, so I can look and listen and feel, without distractions. Loneliness in a strange place hones my tools of perception. My wife worries, because she

doesn’t know where I’m going. I don’t even know. I just wander.

What places inspire you? The Alhambra in Spain—it’s a Moorish castle garden in what’s now a Catholic country, and yet elements of it seem very Chinese. The collision of cultures is centuries old.

Have any places changed you? In Burma [Myanmar],

a monk told me, “Anyone can be a monk—for one day, one month, a year, a lifetime. You can drift in and out. Every morning, go on the street with an alms bowl, and don’t eat until somebody gives you food.” In other words, put yourself at the mercy of your fellow human beings. In the same way, I travel as a monk. Travel feeds my spirit and my knowledge.

—Katie Knorovsky



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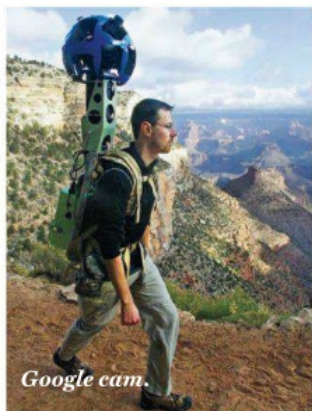
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THE IDEA

Mapping the Future

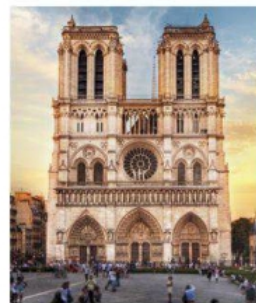
FOR DIGITAL NOMADS and even some Luddites, online maps are a ubiquitous tool. Now Google is pushing deeper into the realm of **virtual travel**. Taking its "Street View" technology off-road, Google Maps has been adding photo tours of popular attractions, from the Colosseum in Rome to Joshua Tree National Park in California, and Google Art Project goes inside 180 museums such as Musée d'Orsay in Paris, giving Internet users anywhere the ability to hop galleries and behold the brushstrokes of Vincent van Gogh.

Most recently? Hikers strapped with 360-degree cameras on backpacks plotted out the Grand Canyon's South Kaibab and Bright Angel trails (above), and cameras on underwater scooters plumbed the depths of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Even North Korean streets can now be zoomed in on. But all that's just the start. Manik Gupta, senior project manager for Google Maps, says eventually virtual travelers may be able to preview, for instance, any restaurant interior to "request that table in the corner." If Google's sights seem set for planetary domination, consider its army: you. Someday, your smartphone shots may help crowdsource a global panorama. Seems it's not time to retire to the armchair just yet. —Brian Lam

THE ROUNDUP

Music to Our Ears

SPRINGTIME IN EUROPE always rings with festivals and concerts, and 2013 cues a cultural cacophony. ¶ On May 6, Paris's **Notre Dame**—and at least 849 other sites—chime in the cathedral's 850th birthday with World Organ Day, a 24-hour-plus marathon of concerts. ¶ So radical was the May 1913 debut of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*—danced by a Russian ballet company—that it sparked a near riot in the aisles of Paris's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. St. Petersburg's **Mariinsky Theatre** premieres updated choreography for Stravinsky's Russian pagan tale on May 14 (in advance of repeat performances in Paris). ¶ To mark the bicentennial of Richard Wagner's birth on May 22, the German maestro's hometown of **Leipzig**—a 73-minute train ride from Berlin—hosts a ten-day festival (concerts, exhibitions, walking tours). ¶ Performing in a 2,000-year-old amphitheater, the **Verona Opera** celebrates its 100th season June 14 to September 8 with a lineup honoring 200 years of Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi. —JENNIFER POCKOCK



High notes (clockwise from top left): Composer Richard Wagner; the Roman amphitheater where the Verona Opera performs; Notre Dame in Paris; Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg.

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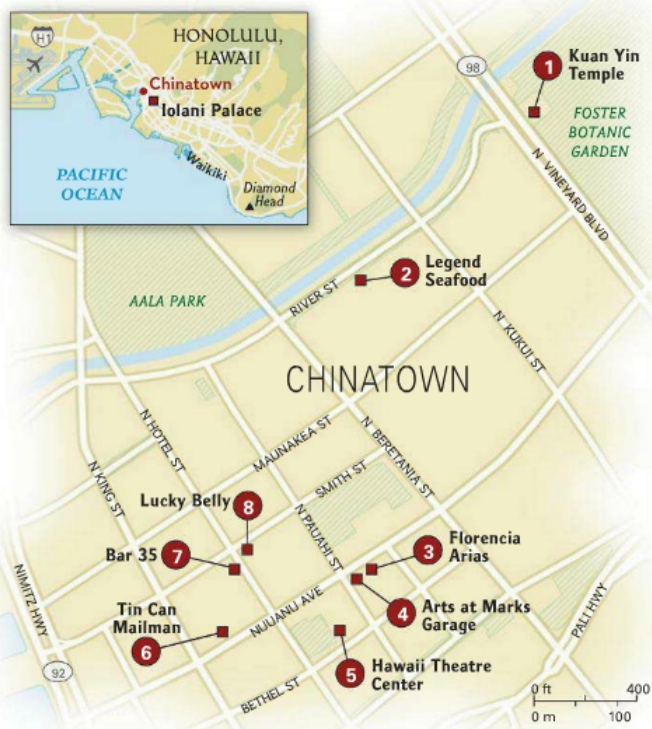
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THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Hawaiian Punch



AN ENCLAVE of 19th- and 20th-century facades near downtown Honolulu, **Chinatown** turned gritty in the 1960s. But the markets, herbalists, and lei shops never lost their bustle, and a new wave of hot spots is bringing in a fashionable crowd. “After dark,” says local artist Cheyne Gallarde, “the lounges, dance clubs, and art venues come alive.”

1 Kuan Yin Temple Incense perfumes this 1880 shrine, the oldest known Buddhist temple in the islands. Followers chant, pray, and place orchids at the golden idol of Kuan Yin. Nuns welcome guests but discourage photography inside.

2 Legend Seafood Families head to this old-style dim sum favorite for taro puffs and *ha gau* (shrimp dumplings).

3 Florencia Arias This tiny shop is stocked with Hawaii-made, cloud-soft knit tunics designed by Florencia Arias, who often works the counter.

4 Arts at Marks Garage This center’s First Friday gallery walks helped launch Chinatown’s renaissance. Art exhibits, poetry slams, burlesque, and improv comedy rev up the ground floor of a square-block parking garage.

5 Hawaii Theatre Center On weekly tours of this 1922 vaudeville theater known as the “Pride of the Pacific,” visitors hear a mini-concert on a classic pipe organ and see trompe l’oeil mosaics and gilded Corinthian pilasters.

6 Tin Can Mailman The bounty here is pure “Hawaiiana,” from vintage postcards and Bakelite bracelets to a 1940s Dorothy Lamour doll with shell lei.

7 Bar 35 A *pau hana* (post-work) scene convenes at indoor and outdoor bars for some 200 beers, DJ nights, and fruit cocktails like the Cherry Blossom Princess.

8 Lucky Belly Honoluluans flock to this new industrial-chic noodle bar for egg-roll-like *lumpia* filled with duck confit, steamed pork-belly buns, and spicy ramen with kimchi. A weekend window serves post-club takeout until 2:30 a.m. —Christopher Hall



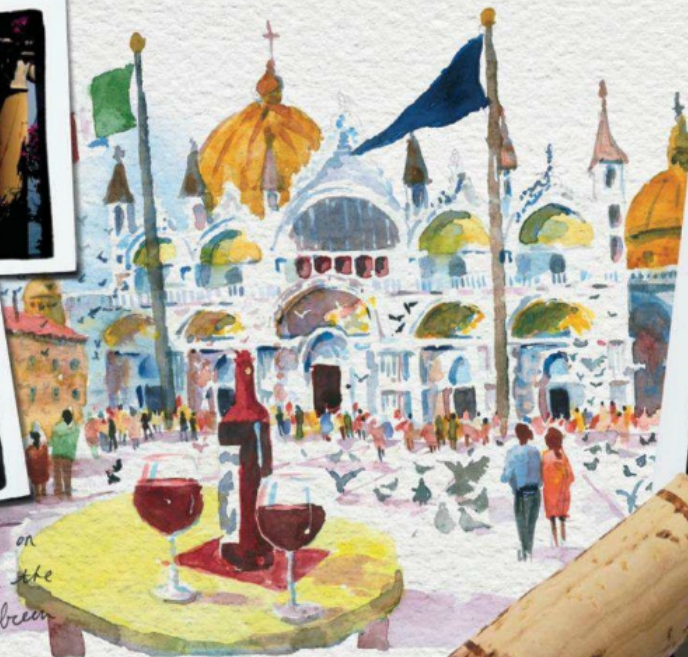
In Chinatown: Chinese New Year festivities; Kuan Yin Temple (left); a hula doll (top).

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GLACIER COUNTRY | Missoula, Montana (top).
WHITEFISH | Biking on the Whitefish Trail (bottom),
by Chuck Haney.



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BILLINGS | Sunset on the Billings rimrock.

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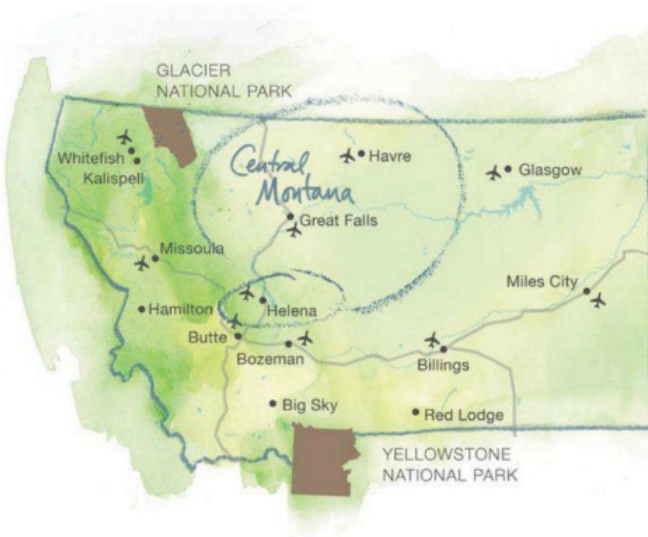


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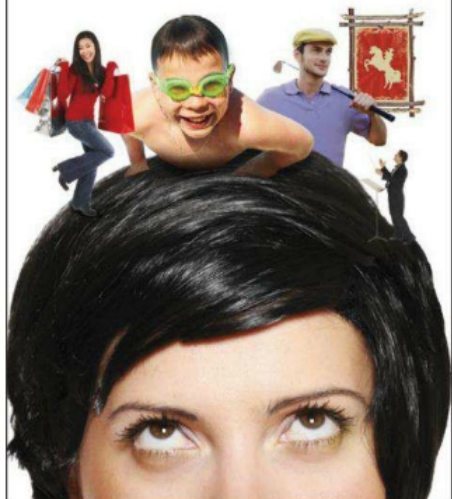
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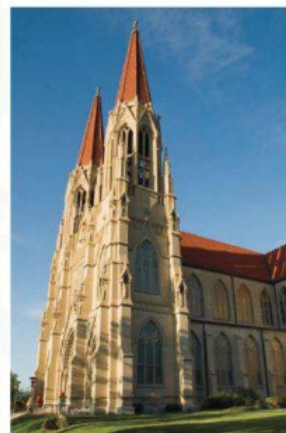
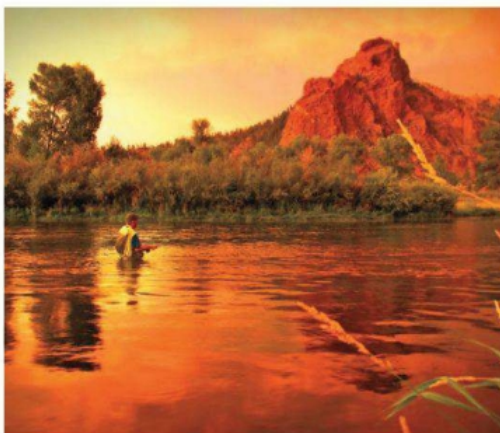
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CENTRAL MONTANA | Fly fishing on the Missouri River (left).
HELENA | Cathedral of St. Helena (right).

DAISANN McLANE

Should You Resort to a Resort?

THE SEAPLANE IS BOBBING on its pontoons in the choppy South Pacific Ocean like a plastic duck in a toddler's bathtub. "You'll have to wade in from here," the pilot shouts over the propeller's rat-tat-tat. I look down doubtfully at the restless sea, the swaying ladder, then take a deep breath and start pulling off my sandals. ¶ Suddenly, in a whoosh, I'm in the air, courtesy of a bare-chested Fijian giant who materializes from the waves and scoops me up with one arm. ¶ "Welcome to the island!" Talk about dramatic arrivals: I half expect the waters to part as he strides to the beach through the roiling foam with me balanced precariously, and

ridiculously, on his shoulders. We draw near to the shoreline, and I see my next two weeks spread out before me like a glossy brochure: cute thatched cottages, bright yellow kayaks in neat rows on the shining sand, pink tropical drinks topped with paper umbrellas. I'm not sure what makes me more uneasy, the thought that I might fall off the Fijian's shoulders or the knowledge that once the airplane flies away I'll be stranded for days on this resort island.

Resorts are a staple of the travel world, but I've always had an uncomfortable, double-edged relationship with them. I know that these man-made destinations—the grand hotels, the all-inclusives, the seaside, countryside, and mountaintop retreats—are protective bubbles. Yet I fell in love with travel because it offered freedom, serendipity, and a way to break out of my comfort zone. Traditional resorts wrap their guests in a cozy blanket of the familiar, filtering out risk, chance, surprises—in other words, the very things that draw many to travel in the first place.

For those of us who plot our travels to maximize contact with real people and places, the idea of squandering precious vacation time in curated, controlled surroundings feels almost like a felony. Guilt kicks in: Really, I should be booking that guesthouse with the shared bathroom in the undiscovered neighborhood. Or kicking back in a string hammock by a beach shack in that little fishing village.

Yet there are times, I'm embarrassed to admit, when I don't want

my travel to be so real. Browsing the Web, I'll stumble on a hotel and, instead of continuing my search, I'll linger and allow the resort sirens to whisper in my ear: "Space! Quiet! Privacy! No decisions!" Then I bargain with myself: If I start my trip with a lazy, insulated week, won't I have more energy to do serious traveling the next?

The truth is, sometimes after working hard at travel, it's nice to have travel take care of you. The first trips I remember taking with my family were to resorts—not the sleek all-inclusives of today but old rambling countryside manors in New York and Pennsylvania surrounded by acres of farmland and forest. Long before the word "sustainable" became a buzzword, these resorts were. The staff were local students or members of the owner's family, and the activities were low-impact things like swimming in the nearby lake, playing tennis and badminton, walking in the woods, and devouring three home-cooked meals a day (remember the "American Plan"?). My sentimental attachment to these mostly vanished hotels of my childhood probably explains my taste in resorts today.

What seems to make all the difference in my resort experiences is local character. Even a bubble can lead to a sense of place. My resort "Big Fails" have been hotels like the concrete compound in the Bahamas I booked as a quick getaway package one cold New York winter. The setting was beautiful but the property so anonymous and anodyne that after three days, dying of boredom in my beach chair, I slipped out the gate and walked to the nearby town. After inquiries at the local conch-fritter joint, I met up with a lady who had a room for rent. I returned to the hotel, packed up my things, and fled to the other side of paradise.

Then there are the resorts I enter and never want to leave, like the loopy beach hotel in the Dominican Republic. Architecturally, it was as anonymous as the Bahamas hotel. But the owner, a middle-aged Italian expat, had found himself a local girlfriend and become a well-known character in town. Every

night he would host a party by the pool for his guests and invite all the neighborhood musicians, who would pass beers and guitars around and sing Dominican merengues and *bachatas* under the moon. In his resort, you never forgot where in the world you were.

Quirky owners, landmark old buildings, fellow guests who don't speak your language—when a resort has one or more of these wild cards, you can embrace your craving for an escape while still feeding your traveler's sense of discovery.

Perched on the bronzed shoulders of the Fijian man, I felt I had "tourist" written all over me. But not for long. It turns out my porter and the other workers at the resort hailed from the only village on the little island—and the village controlled the island's land, leasing it to the resort's foreign owner. The workers were the bosses, which meant the bosses, ultimately, worked for the workers. I swam in the ocean, went to church in the village, and one night even played the ukulele with the man who'd carried me to shore. I was in a bubble, I know, and not exactly traveling. Yet I felt like a traveler still. ■



Natural beauty gives resorts a sense of place.

DAISANN McLANE divides her time between New York and Hong Kong. Follow her on Twitter, @Daisann_McLane.

CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Focus on the Family Vacation

THE AMERICAN FAMILY vacation needs an overhaul. Once the best opportunity for enrichment and education as well as much needed R & R, today it's often a dysfunctional, unhealthy, sense-dulling waste of time and money, typically enabled and abetted by an unimaginative travel industry. ¶ Don't believe me? Then head to some of America's vacation hot spots this summer, such as Orlando, Gatlinburg (Tennessee), Grand Canyon National Park, or Honolulu, and watch the families. Thoughtlessly, parents herd their kids into fast-food restaurants, novelty museums, and theme parks. At night, they deposit their offspring in the

hotel's kids center, where Junior and his siblings huddle around their electronic overlords, ignoring all external stimuli. Really, why even bother leaving home?

What's driving the dumbing down of the American family vacation? We parents are, to some extent. We're too tired to prepare real meals for the kids, and we're too busy to plan enriching travel experiences, so we buy what's easy—processed junk food and off-the-shelf, highly marketed package vacations that are overly focused on amusement. Consider this telling number: About 50 million visitors go to Florida's Disney World complex every year to go on thrill rides and have tea with cartoon characters. Meanwhile, just 63 miles away, the Kennedy Space Center, where you can touch an actual moon rock and shake hands with a real live astronaut, draws a little over 1 million people a year. And did I mention that the \$50 adult admission costs about half that of a Disney daily ticket?

Just as the food industry can produce healthier fare, the travel business can do better. The idea came to me at the end of an otherwise spectacular guided group tour to Italy last year. We'd done it all—explored the Colosseum in Rome, visited the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, and seen Michelangelo's "David" at the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence. It was a once-in-a-lifetime trip. Then we sat down to dinner and the kids were served pizza, chicken tenders, and burgers. We flew more than 5,000 miles, to a country

known for its cuisine, and they're eating fries? *Mamma mia!*

Hotels have been phoning it in for years. When our kids were younger, we stayed at a swanky resort in St. Petersburg, Florida, that offered a kids program with activities around an ocean theme. We dropped them off before dinner. When we returned, we found our kids reclining on beanbags, staring catatonically at a video. Turns out all those educational programs were only offered during the day in the high season.

I admit, it's difficult to say no to our sons and daughters. But just as we don't allow them to eat junk food all the time, we shouldn't take them on junk vacations all the time. In fact, when it comes to peeling them away from their tech devices, a vacation is perhaps your golden opportunity. "A change of venue allows a change of perspective," says Ann Meier, a University of Minnesota sociologist who studies family relationships. "Vacations are good bonding and enriching moments." Research suggests that spending time learning together as a family helps develop reading and writing skills in kids. That means a well-planned vacation could even help your kids get into the Ivy League.

The trick isn't to take all the fun away but to plan a vacation so that learning is inevitable. For example, a visit to Boston can include an afternoon on the Freedom Trail, a slice of Boston cream pie, and a visit to Harvard (never too early to think college!). On Oahu? The North Shore gets all of the attention for its surfing, but take your kids to the Waimea Arboretum and Botanical Garden, and they'll learn about ancient Polynesian cultures, too. The country is in the middle of commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War: Many states in the East and some in the West have war sites, so work in a battlefield on your way to the water park; admission is often free.

OK, that's easier said than done. I know because since 2011, I've been on the road almost nonstop with my own family, blogging on National Geographic Traveler's Intelligent Travel blog (intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com). I'll never forget my 10-year-old son sleeping through a narrated tour of Canada's Jasper National Park. He missed a three-hour lesson in geography, history, and zoology. Yet we've also had many "high five" moments, like the time we visited Put-in-Bay, an island in Lake Erie, and our fifth grader stood at the top of the International Peace Memorial and something clicked about the War of 1812. We know because weeks later, at another museum, he correctly identified a portrait of Capt. Oliver Perry and informed the curator about the techniques used to win the Battle of Lake Erie. Wow.

A few travel companies get it, offering tours that expand horizons and combine adventure with education in just the right proportions. (See our own "Tours of a Lifetime" package in this issue for examples.) I'm calling on the others—the vast majority of travel agents, tour operators, and cruise lines that create America's family getaways—to help parents give their families better vacations. ■



Plan family trips so that learning is inevitable.

CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT addresses readers' travel problems. E-mail your story to celliott@ngs.org.

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Keys to the Emerald City

HAVE A CONFESSION to make. I don't much like cities. In fact, as a kid I hated them. Growing up in the suburbs of New Jersey a few turnpike exits away from Manhattan, I gravitated to the woods, streams, and fields of the Garden State instead of the concrete jungle that was home to my immigrant relatives. Nature made sense to me—it had a rhythm and reason I could understand. ¶ None of this is surprising for a guy who ended up working in the conservation field. But somewhere along the way, I came to appreciate not just the appeal of cities (museums, people, and culture) but also their outsize role in affecting the planet's future. According to the United Nations, half the

world's population now lives in cities, and that proportion is expected to increase to more than two-thirds by 2050. If we are to solve our most pressing problems, from climate change to dwindling freshwater resources, we have to get it right in our urban centers. The challenges are immense, but so are the opportunities. Today, cities are sprouting some of the most innovative green projects in the world, redefining a sustainable future for urban dwellers—and attracting travelers, too. Here are just a few.

High-rise shrubbery in Milan: The world's first vertical urban forest is rising above Italy's largest industrial city. Bosco Verticale, scheduled for completion this year, consists of double towers planted with some 700 trees, 5,000 shrubs, and 11,000 smaller plants. The vegetation will create a microclimate that supports birds, butterflies, and other insects, while also absorbing dust—a serious problem in Milan—and CO₂, linked to climate change. It will also cut noise pollution and conserve energy. As growing urban populations strain available space, the idea is to expand upward rather than outward. Though questions remain, Bosco Verticale provides a glimpse of a future where skyscrapers might one day double as forests.

Solar trees in Singapore: With environmental awareness on the rise among its youthful population, this clean-cut, high-tech city is emerging as the green capital of Asia. Witness the new Gardens by the Bay, an ambitious renewable energy project and ecotourism

attraction set on 250 acres of reclaimed land, offering a greener vision of urban renewal. It features 18 solar-powered “supertrees” up to 16 stories tall, made from steel and concrete “trunks” covered in thousands of plants. Two massive, futuristic-looking glass conservatories capture and filter rainwater. Inside is a Noah's ark of some of the world's plants, including, for visitors, interpretations of their modern and traditional uses.

Carbon-sucking spree in Chicago: The famous Millennium Park—surrounded by trendy restaurants and filled with trees and flowers—is actually the largest green roof in the world, stretching some 25 acres over a bustling underground commuter rail station and parking garages. It forms the heart of Chicago's green belt (which covers roughly 17 percent of the metropolis and removes more than 25,000 tons of greenhouse gases from the air annually). The past several years under Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his predecessor Richard M. Daley have seen the city shutter two smog-creating coal-fired power plants that rained pollution onto low-income neighborhoods, call for all new buildings to meet LEED standards, invest in 100 miles of bikeways, and make plans for replacement of 900 miles of leaky city water pipes.

Trash to treasure in Sydney: Australia's first regional food-waste-to-energy power plant, EarthPower can convert over 80,000 tons of food waste each year into renewable energy. An anaerobic process transforms nearly one-third of the city's discarded leftovers (think of the restaurant scraps alone). The results are a biogas that helps power the metropolitan area's electrical grid and the prevention of food rubbish from rotting in landfills and producing methane—a large contributor to global warming.

Electricity-making sidewalks in London: Sidewalk slabs—made from old car tires—that generate electricity from the pressure of a footstep, harnessing the kinetic energy of walking to power streetlights and other electronics? During last year's Olympic Games, temporary slabs made enough energy to light up the walkway between the Tube station and the stadium each night. They are now being installed permanently at the Westfield Stratford City shopping center near the Olympic Stadium. Airports could be next, capturing the frantic energy of travelers as they rush to catch their flights.

“Things that were unimaginable just a few years ago are now possible,” says Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Earth Institute. But he also warns that time is running out. “I believe we have maybe two generations to embrace the technologies that allow us the benefits of modern life while sustaining the planet.”

That's roughly 50 years. Not a long time, but who would have imagined even a decade ago the apiary that now produces local honey atop New York's Whitney Museum of American Art? I can see a day when city dwellers will take an elevator to the 27th floor to buy organic vegetables from skyscraper farmers using compost to help power the building—and lifting us closer to a sustainable future. ■



Green giant: Chicago's Millennium Park.



St. Saphorin in the Lavaux winegrowing region (a UNESCO World Heritage)

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DAY 1 | Zion

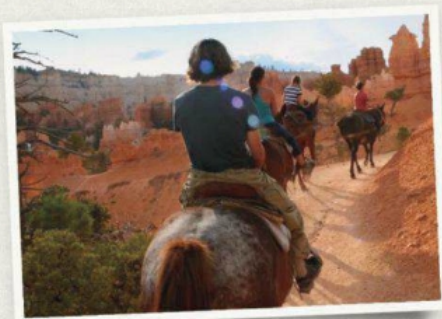
HIKE THE NARROWS Enjoy one of the world's best canyon hikes up the shallow Virgin River. Redrock canyon walls reach into the sky above as you splash and stroll through the river's cool waters.



DAY 2 | Zion to Bryce Canyon

WALK TO EMERALD POOLS Stroll easily to lush waterfalls, which cascade down towering redrock formations with a colorful splash.

DRIVE THE SCENIC LOOP Hit the road along the Mt. Carmel Scenic Byway (Hwy 89) to Bryce Canyon, then stay in the car a little longer for the 38-mile scenic loop, which is especially brilliant in the hours around sunrise or sunset.



DAY 3 | Bryce Canyon to Capitol Reef

RIDE BENEATH THE HOODOOS Saddle up for a guided mule ride to the floor of Bryce Canyon, passing beneath the otherworldly rock formations called "hoodoos" along the way.

WATCH A SUNSET LIKE NO OTHER After winding along one of America's "Top 10 Scenic Roads" (Hwy 12), start your Capitol Reef explorations by watching the sky turn from coral to violet at Sunset Point.

DAY 4 | Explore Capitol Reef

BIKE THE HISTORIC BURR TRAIL Rent mountain bikes to cover some ground as you roll past ancient petroglyphs, historic orchards and dramatic slot canyons on this famous trail.

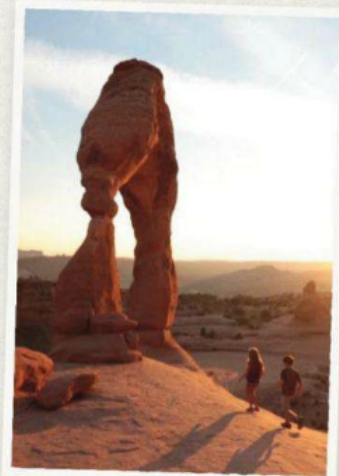
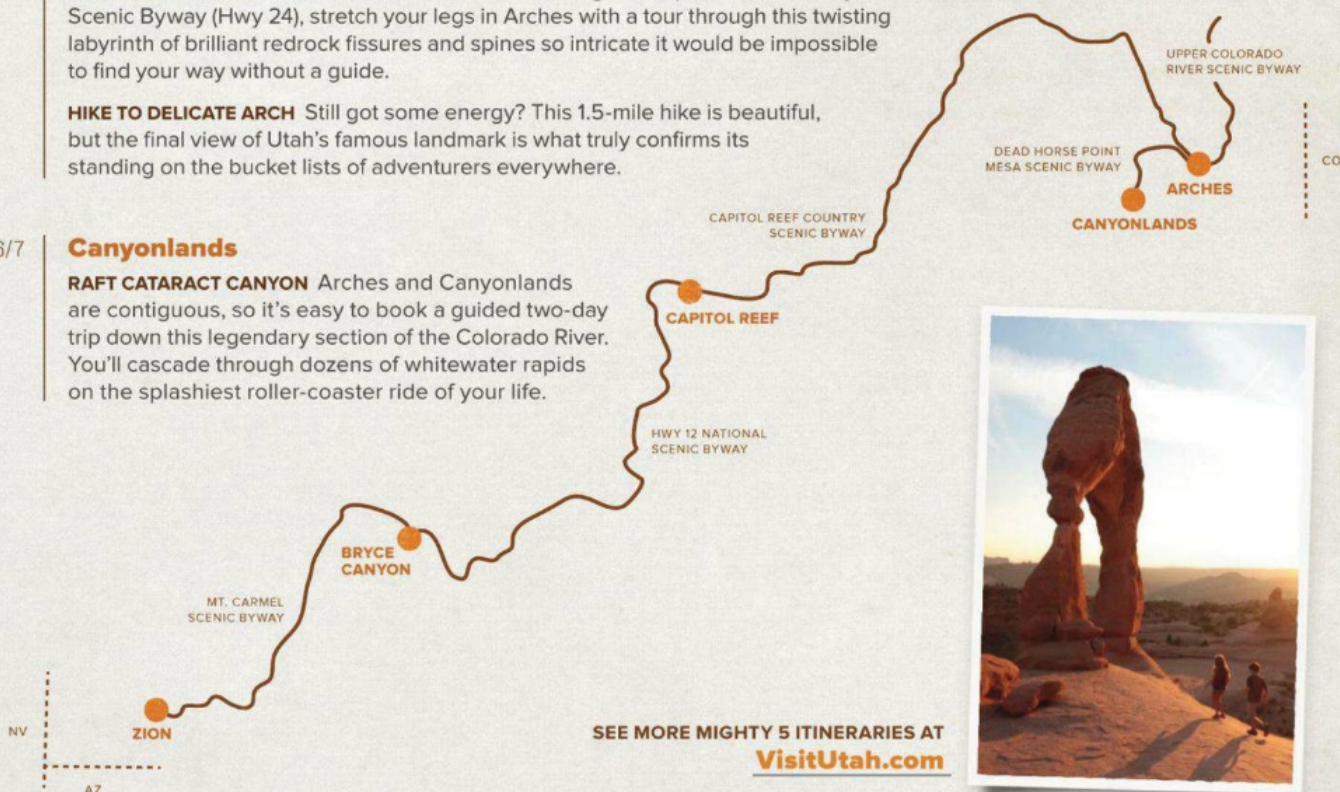
DAY 5 | Capitol Reef to Arches

TOUR THE FIERY FURNACE After a two-hour drive along the Capitol Reef Country Scenic Byway (Hwy 24), stretch your legs in Arches with a tour through this twisting labyrinth of brilliant redrock fissures and spines so intricate it would be impossible to find your way without a guide.

HIKE TO DELICATE ARCH Still got some energy? This 1.5-mile hike is beautiful, but the final view of Utah's famous landmark is what truly confirms its standing on the bucket lists of adventurers everywhere.

DAY 6/7 | Canyonlands

RAFT CATARACT CANYON Arches and Canyonlands are contiguous, so it's easy to book a guided two-day trip down this legendary section of the Colorado River. You'll cascade through dozens of whitewater rapids on the splashiest roller-coaster ride of your life.



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The 19th-century Rathaus is the centerpiece of Hamburg's market square.



German Ingenuity

HAMBURG STEPS INTO THE FUTURE WITH NEW URBAN DESIGN

By NYKA ALEXANDER

IN MARCH 1910, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin convinced the citizens of Hamburg that they needed to make room for the wave of the future: the airship. By the next year, the city had opened one of the world's first airports. This spirit of openness to new ideas is a defining quality of Hamburg, which has welcomed outsiders since it was a major trading post in the 13th century. "In other German cities you can expect people will speak English, but in Hamburg you can expect them to help you," says relocation expert Brigitta Moeller.

North of the port, downtown is built around two artificial lakes, a network of canals, and some 2,300 bridges. Blanketed in trees and parks, Hamburg is one of Europe's greenest cities. And the former warehouse district is being transformed into an übermodern place to live, work, and play.

DAY ONE

MORNING *Portside amble*

The North Sea wind can be brisk, even in the summer, so a sweater comes in handy. To get a sense of the port, start in **HafenCity**, now Europe's largest construction project, where warehouses are becoming apartments, cafés, and a flagship glass concert hall designed by Herzog & de Meuron: the Elbphilharmonie. It won't open until 2017, but you can stick your head—Alice in Wonderland style—into a miniature version of the building to test the acoustics. Head a few blocks east and take the pedestrian bridge across Brooktorhafen canal to the **International Maritime Museum Hamburg**. Divided into nine "decks," the museum spans 3,000 years of maritime history. Among its oldest items: a primitive boat carved from a 1,400-year-old tree trunk that was discovered in the Elbe River.

From here, walk along the area's canals to another architectural wonder: the triangular **Chilehaus**. Built by a merchant who made a fortune in Chile, it exemplifies a 1920s style known as brick expressionism.

AFTERNOON *Ferry land*

At the Landungsbrücken subway station, take a stairwell deep into the **Old Elbe tunnel**. On weekends, the hundred-year-old underground link between the city and the shipyards closes to traffic, allowing pedestrians to walk or bike through. (Rent bikes from one of the 70 rental points for the bright red StadtRAD public bikes.) Look for the 1911 tile friezes of, among other things, rats scurrying over a pair of boots. Once back on the city side, skip organized boat tours and hop on **public ferry 62** to crisscross the Elbe River, cruising alongside giant cargo ships or the *Queen Elizabeth* in season, passing

a Cold War-era submarine. Get off at the Altona Fischmarkt stop to peruse **Stilwerk**, eight floors of furniture and design shops with a decidedly northern European aesthetic. Grab a quick meal at one of the fish restaurants along Grosse Elbstrasse leading to the fish market. **Hummer Pedersen** serves seafood fresh from the port; the cold-appetizer trio makes a good sampler.

EVENING *Dishy plates*

At the Michelin-starred **Landhaus Scherrer**, the Old World service and family atmosphere are in stark contrast to the racy charger plates portraying a model posed among fruits and vegetables. (A local artist produces a new version each season.) The restaurant deftly creates dishes such as beets four ways, including a shot glass of foamy crimson soup. In the middle price range is **Parlament**, a relatively young restaurant in the cellar of the Rathaus, the historic town hall. The location imposes a gravitas that modernization has luckily not erased. Order *pannfisch* (fried fish fillets), a simple local specialty, or try the Salt Meadow lamb, raised in the salty marshlands north of the city. To check off a tourist “must,” go to the **St. Pauli red-light district** to stroll past the seedy clubs of the Reeperbahn, where the Beatles honed their signature sound.

DAY TWO

MORNING *Art stroll*

Have breakfast at the branch of **Mutterland** near the Hamburg Hauptbahnhof, the main train station. Former flight attendant and Hamburg native Marge Ziegler produces the jams. “Making and eating jam is typical German,” she says. “There’s no country where they eat so much of it.” Two flavors are specific to Hamburg: Moin Moin Hamburg (“hello, Hamburg”), a blend of the exotic fruits that come through the port; and Hamburger Kirsch, a riff on Black Forest cake made with native cherries and chocolate liqueur. Besides local jams, this emporium of all things German carries artisanal whiskeys with cartoon labels and single-source chocolates. This is a good launching point for the museums along the **Kunstmeile** (“art mile”). Start at the imposing Kuntshalle. Although the collection runs from Old Masters to contemporary—from Rembrandt to Andreas Gursky—its forte is modern German art, such as Swiss/German painter Paul Klee’s gleaming “The Golden Fish” (1925). Head south, parallel to the railroad tracks, to the **Deichtorhallen**, Europe’s largest exhibition center for contemporary art and photography.



A train (above) passes over a scenic canal near the center of Hamburg, where visitors walk along the historic Alsterarkaden passageway (left) lined with outdoor cafés and boutiques.

reputation on a minimalist vision of simple lines and a restricted color palette—and has credited her city with honing this vision. Visit her shop along Neuer Wall to see the spring and summer collection—her first since regaining her label after an eight-year absence—which features puffed-out sleeves on shirts and dresses.

EVENING *Auf Wiedersehen*

To sample the signature northern German dish *labskaus*, purportedly a favorite of sailors since the 1800s, visit the **Old Commercial Room** (established in 1795). The mess of potatoes, corned beef, onions, and beets looks unappealing, but topped with an egg and accompanied by pickles, it comes together in a rich, satisfying meal. Cold War buffs should ask to sit at former chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s favorite table. Say goodbye to Hamburg with a drink and an almost panoramic view of the city and harbor from the bar on the top floor of the **Empire Riverside Hotel**. Or opt for one more shot of high culture with an evening at the **Staatsoper Hamburg**. The current venue opened in 1955—all gleaming glass and marble—carrying on a tradition of public opera begun in the city in 1678, when merchants opened a theater for opera despite objections by the city’s religious leaders, who decried its secular nature. ■

AFTERNOON *Native goods*

Although Hamburg claims no paternity of the hamburger, the patty of minced meat called a *frikadelle* is a close relative. (It is usually served with tomato sauce, no bun.) There is no dispute, however, over Hamburg’s ownership of the *franzbrötchen*, a buttery pastry weighed down with just caramelized sugar and cinnamon. Try one from the **Dat Backhus** chain. (Choose the branch at Speersort street to see the preserved base of a tower, which may or may not be Hamburg’s first building, dating back to A.D. 800.) Another native is designer **Jil Sander**, who has built her international

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 GARDENS: From April 26 to October 13, Hamburg will host the **International Garden Show** on Wilhelmsburg island on the Elbe River. The 250 acres of gardens will be divided into seven areas, including wanderlust, foreign languages, and customs. The **Elbjazz Festival** (May 24–25) will feature 50 concerts on ten stages in the port district, with the option to hop from concert to concert by boat.

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European History 101

HERE, THE KIDS WILL FEEL THE PAST COME ALIVE



The evzones (guards) parade past the Parthenon in Athens during a flag-raising ceremony.

ATHENS, GREECE

Roots of Democracy

THE BEST PART of being in Athens is the ability to explore across centuries," says Eleni Vainas, a Greek-American poet, animator, and longtime resident of the capital of Greece. "Walking around Athens is a living history lesson. Modern is juxtaposed with ancient, and art is featured throughout the city in ways that touch people on an everyday basis."

Any child who has taken basic world history classes knows about Athens and its indelible contribution to Western civilization. But studying a place and its heritage is far different from actually being there, especially if you are on a flat-topped hill

called the Acropolis, gazing up at one of the most perfect structures ever built by man—the Parthenon.

Where indeed would we be without the ancient Greeks, their legacy of philosophy and democracy, their obsession with figuring out how Earth and the heavens function, their groundbreaking strides in mathematics and medicine?

Greek civilization didn't start in Athens, but it reached its greatest height here in the fifth century B.C. under legendary figures like Pericles, Sophocles, and Socrates. Kids who clamber across the Acropolis and enter its new museum—which displays statues of a three-bodied monster and the goddess Nike leaning over to tie her sandal—gain a tangible connection with a bygone world that gave us so much of our own civilization.

The Parthenon alone is worth the trip. Dedicated to the goddess Athena, the temple arose between 447 and 438 B.C. The roof may be gone, but nothing can detract from the building's graceful, geometric lines. Focal point of the Acropolis hill, the Parthenon was later turned into a Byzantine church, a cathedral, an Ottoman mosque, and a warehouse to store gunpowder for the Turkish army, before it was resurrected as a global icon after Greece gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The shimmering, white structure is one of 20 atop or attached to the sides of the Acropolis, including two open-air theaters. In a flashback to those ancient times, families can attend performances at the hillside Odeon of Herodes Atticus during June's annual Athens Hellenic Festival.

BERLIN, GERMANY

East Meets West

IT'S DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE what this city was like in the early 1960s, when the 87-mile-long Berlin Wall was intact and bristling with barbed wire and gun emplacements. So desperate were they to cross to the West, East Berliners tried such tactics as hot-air ballooning, tunneling, and hiding in hollowed-out car panels. Many were shot for their efforts. Today, the wall has essentially been shattered into tiny bits, now scattered as souvenirs around the world.

You can navigate its former route by guided Segway, walking, or "video bus" tours. Or hike or bike the Berlin Wall Trail, marked by signs and special cobblestones that trace the wall's former path. Ask the kids to lead the way with a street map or handheld GPS-based MauerGuide. Only three small sections of the concrete wall remain, now safeguarded as national historic treasures.

A remnant on Bernauer Strasse is seen from a viewing tower that also shows old black-and-white documentaries of people trying to escape East Berlin. The East Side Gallery showcases the work of more than 100 international artists commissioned to cover the wall in striking murals and graffiti.

Another one of the remains is between Potsdamer Platz and Checkpoint Charlie, once the key crossing point between East and West used by foreign diplomats and military. A museum is nearby, and kids will be able to travel back to a long-lost era through escape apparatuses such as a hollowed-out surfboard, and films of the divided Berliners in paroxysms of celebration. And they will get an important lesson here—the fall of the wall is a symbol of how humanity's hunger for freedom can topple authoritarianism.

When the wall came down in 1990, East Berlin was a dour warren of bombed-out buildings, courtyards filled with rusty cars, and shabby apartments. Now East and West are virtually indistinguishable, though cross a street in Berlin and you'll see a quaint echo of Communist yesterday: the now cherished little green and red men called Ampelmännchen who signal walk/don't walk.

"Many who live in the East have a selective memory, a deep nostalgia for the good old DDR [East Germany]," says journalist Cornelia Höhling, a native East Berliner. "This includes the Ampel men and the old Trabi cars. Everything else is disappearing quickly."

You can explore historic East Berlin in



A girl swings in front of a colorful, graffiti-covered remainder of the Berlin Wall.

a Trabi, the cute car manufactured during Communist days. "There was a shortage of steel in those days, so the shell is made from cotton resin," says Trabi-Safari manager Simone Matern. Led by a guide, you drive the Trabi on a tour that passes the site of Hitler's bunker, the Reichstag, and Karl-Marx-Allee, with its imposing socialist realist architecture.

WATERLOO, BELGIUM

Napoleon's Battlefield

ABOUT A HALF HOUR south of Brussels, Waterloo, the only fully preserved battlefield in Europe, offers a Continental version of Gettysburg. First, a bit of background: In 1814, French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated his crown and was exiled to the Italian island of Elba. He escaped, made his way back to France, and took power again. No way, said the British (under the Duke of Wellington) and the Prussians (led by Gebhard

Leberecht von Blücher), who were poised to invade France. Napoleon took the initiative and led his army to confront the allies near the tiny Belgian village of Waterloo on June 18, 1815. Some 185,000 troops fought, 48,000 were killed or wounded, and the English language gained the classic expression to "meet your Waterloo" (ultimate defeat) as Napoleon certainly did.

"If Napoleon had won at Waterloo, the catchphrase to the history of the world would be different," says military history expert Caleb Carr. "There were just a lot of impressive guys on both sides. Start with Napoleon, one of history's greatest figures. You also had the Duke of Wellington, and von Blücher, an amazing character who was 72 years old and charging around the battlefield."

Join the battle at the hamlet of Lion's Mound, where a visitors center offers a treasure hunt book for children and two movies chronicle the conflict. Across the road is the Waterloo Wax Museum, where a giant fresco brings the conflict alive.

From there is a bird's-eye view of the battlefield and its memorial, the Lion's Mound, a 131-foot-high, man-made cone of earth named for the iron lion that crowns it. On summer weekends, the battlefield reverberates with cavalry, cannon fire, and reenactors in uniform. "Waterloo has taken on the status of a great battle," says Carr, "but it was really something that transcended military history." ■



A cavalry reenactment at Waterloo in Belgium.

Adapted from 100 Places That Can Change Your Child's Life (National Geographic, 2012) by Editor in Chief Keith Bellows

Welsh poetry illuminates the Millennium Centre in the redeveloped Cardiff Bay area.



The Cardiff Giant

OFF-THE-SHIP ADVENTURES IN THE CAPITAL OF WALES

By KRISTAN SCHILLER

SITUATED ON THE SOUTH coast of Wales, Cardiff was once one of Europe's busiest ports and the largest exporter of coal in the world. After a severe slump that lasted into the late 1980s, the Welsh capital has bounced back as a cultural hub—with an edge. The city's smartly redeveloped waterfront has revived this town and helped propel it into the 21st century.

ARTS OF THE WORLD Every two years for the past decade, the **National Museum Cardiff** has sponsored the prestigious Artes Mundi exhibition. Awarding the U.K.'s largest modern arts prize (\$60,000), Artes Mundi takes entries from all over the world and selects a single contemporary artist whose work explores social themes. During Artes Mundi, Cardiff Bay vibrates with activity while competing entries are

shown at the **National Museum of Art's** six new contemporary galleries. There's also an artist-curated film series at the **Chapter Arts Centre** and live music and theater performances at venues throughout the city. For art to take home, hop on over to **Craft in the Bay**, a Cardiff Bay gallery that sells modern Welsh jewelry and textiles made by local artisans. (4 hours)

FARM TO TABLE At the **Wales Millennium Centre**, a bustling performing arts complex, Ffresh Bar & Restaurant turns out inventive seasonal cuisine using only local suppliers, with entrées like Black Mountain smoked duck. Gaze out giant windows with views toward the bay while sipping a fizzy Welsh lemonade. Meanwhile, the **Potted Pig**, located in a former bank vault, serves regional dishes, including Welsh rarebit and egg and soldiers (toast strips). (3 hours)

LOCAL LEGEND Follow in the footsteps of beloved children's book author Roald Dahl, creator of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The writer was born and raised in Llandaff, a suburb of Cardiff, after his parents emigrated from Norway. A blue plaque commemorates Dahl's life and work at **11 High Street** in Llandaff, a former confectionery shop where Dahl once placed a dead mouse in a candy jar. Walk along the public **Roald Dahl Plass** on the waterfront, and stop at the former wooden church where Dahl was christened. The building recently reopened as the **Norwegian Church Arts Centre** with its adjoining café, Norsk, offering Nordic nibbles such as sweet herring and gravlax. Both can be reached by way of the **Cardiff Bay Trail**, a 6.2-mile route that takes walkers and cyclists around the bay and continues to the seaside resort town of Penarth. (5 hours) ■

Unseen Beauty, Unforgettable Hangzhou 杭州

In the Song Dynasty, the great poet *Su Dongpo* wrote a poem extolling the beauty of Hangzhou's West Lake, comparing the world famous landmark to the divine *Lady Xizi* (one of the four ancient beauties).

*Charming she looks whether richly made up or only slightly so.
Lovingly my eyes dwell on every familiar sight.
The lakeside view I'll miss most sadly of all.*

While there is no disputing the magical influence the West Lake has had on poets, painters, scholars, historical figures, residents and tourists for hundreds and even thousands of years, the entire Hangzhou region exudes a near mystical appeal.

The city has had a colorful and turbulent history. Founded during the Qin Dynasty and renamed Hangzhou, meaning "river-ferrying prefecture" in around 589AD, it was the capital of the Wuyue Kingdom from 907 to 978 during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. In 1856 the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom occupied Hangzhou and more recently, the city was ruled by the Republic of China government under the Kuomintang from 1928 to 1949.

Even the legendary traveler Marco Polo visited the city. When he arrived in the 13th century he declared, "It is the most beautiful and elegant city in the world."

The exquisite West Lake, dotted with ancient temples, pagodas, gardens and teahouses, is the timeless soul of the city. Located in the middle of Hangzhou and surrounded by mountains on three sides, it is divided by causeways into five areas, taking in a large natural island and three small man-made islands. The inspiration for some of

China's most famous gardens, it was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011.

But the rest of Hangzhou is no less beguiling, offering numerous unique attractions just waiting to be discovered. For example, Lingyin Temple, or "retreat of souls" in Chinese, believed to be the oldest Buddhist temple in the city.

Equally unmissable is Hefang Street, a mile-long pedestrian walkway decorated in an authentically ancient style. The emperors' palace was once built beside it, making it the economic and political center of Hangzhou. Most of the shops on the street have a history of more than 100 years and sell typical Hangzhou products such as excellent quality silk fabrics and garments, Hangzhou Longjing (Dragon Well) tea, considered one of China's best, and Wangxingji paper fans.

At 4.4 sq miles, Xixi Wetland Park is the first of its kind in China, featuring numerous animals, including endangered and rare plants, birds, fish and frog species. A temple and several historic houses make for a fascinating visit.

Another major draw is the delicious local cuisine. Restaurants serve classic Hangzhou dishes such as West Lake vinegar fish, Dongpo pork, Longjing shrimp, beggar's chicken, steamed rice and pork wrapped in lotus leaves and lotus root pudding.

Shopping is also a fun experience for visitors. As well as the colorful markets that offer a more contemporary retail experience.

Hangzhou Tourism Commission is counting on these and other local attractions to draw in more international tourists. An ambitious overseas advertising campaign featuring the slogan, "Unseen Beauty, Unforgettable Hangzhou" backs up an "internationalization" strategy currently making it easier for tourists to travel freely to one of China's most important tourism cities.

The cool, dry, springtime weather makes it ideal to visit now and the city is keen to show what it can offer.

It's a perfect time to explore Hangzhou's unseen beauty, and discover for yourself what makes it quite so unforgettable!



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Waterway Treasures

AMSTERDAM'S CANAL HOTELS RING IN A NEW DUTCH GOLDEN AGE

By RAPHAEL KADUSHIN

EVERY EUROPEAN CITY boasting a canal or two gets dubbed the Venice of the north. But Amsterdam can claim the title honestly. Its historic liquid core, a checkerboard of intersecting canals, received formal UNESCO recognition as a World Heritage site in 2010 and is now marking its quadricentennial. "This year is the 400th anniversary of our canal district," says Brita Röhl, general manager of the Hotel Seven One Seven. "And the city's most renowned art museum, the Rijksmuseum, reopened in April after a major renovation. So Amsterdam will be celebrating itself this year." As part of the citywide salute, Röhl's hotel has joined with other canal-ring

hotels, restaurants, and museums in a loose union dubbed Amsterdam Canals 2013, to showcase the city's canal-centric charms and vibrant past. "We want to make sure visitors know that they can eat traditional dishes in canalside restaurants, visit the special exhibits on canal history, and tour the area on luxury canal boats," Röhl says. And, of course, sleep in one of the gabled, waterside mansions that Amsterdam's merchant burghers built when their city boomed. In recent years, these treasure houses have been converted into hotels, so you can wake up to the same views of waterways and arched brick bridges that the city's pioneers did. Among the first to be converted was the **Ambassade** (from \$330),

a row of 11 adjoining 17th-century canal houses overlooking a graceful curve of the Singel canal. A recent renovation resulted in upgraded marble tile bathrooms. But the hotel's deft blend of Dutch classicism and coziness remains intact: The maze of halls and stairs that would confuse M. C. Escher; the French reproduction furniture that defies split-second trends; and a handsome library bulging with some 3,000 books, signed by well-known authors passing through town.

The newer, fittingly named **Canal House** hotel (from \$317), a trio of 17th-century canal houses around a watery corner from Anne Frank's house, pays a more playful homage to golden age aesthetics. The 23



Room with a view: The Hotel Estheréa's delft blue guest room overlooks the broad Singel canal, Amsterdam's oldest waterway.



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



A gallery of oil paintings greets guests in the entranceway of the Canal House.

rooms feature a sensuous array of silks and velvets that could pass for the backdrop in a Dutch still life. At night, the two garden houses surrounded by Japanese maples open for private, candlelight dining.

The stylish **Dylan** (from \$363) started life as a theater and morphed into Amsterdam's first canal-side boutique hotel. Renovated in stages over the past decade, the hotel offers guest rooms ranging from Asian-style havens with black lacquered four-poster beds to beamed loftlike duplexes. The hotel's Michelin-starred Vinkes restaurant features French cuisine and excellent views of the canal. If you prefer to skip the formal dining room, you can sample the same menu and view Amsterdam's cityscape by eating on board the hotel's wooden salon boat as it floats down the canal.

Nearby on the Prinsengracht (the city's longest canal), the recently opened **Andaz** (from \$430) is the canal belt's newest "it" hotel (and the Dutch debut of the Hyatt chain's Andaz brand). Formerly the city's public library, the hotel was revamped by local designer Marcel Wanders, who turned the hotel into a tribute to Dutch icons. Oversize photos of herring hang above beds; clogs are nailed to walls; delft blue wallpaper printed with gabled houses covers the bathroom walls. Guest can wheel out on the hotel's complimentary bikes or relax in the dark wood Bluespoon Bar, sipping wines from southwestern Holland.

Cheaper options on the pricey canal belt don't necessarily mean sacrificing canal views or style. The **Toren** (from \$106) on the Keizersgracht, outfits its traditional rooms with a sea of damask and ornate glass chandeliers. **Dikker & Thijs Fenice Hotel** (from \$118), located on the Prinsengracht, began as a gourmet food shop famous for its caviar and now houses an art gallery hosting wine pairings and revolving photo exhibits. The family-run **Hotel Estheréa** (from \$138) keeps things classic with a 17th-century facade on the Singel canal and a garden aesthetic of flowery wallpaper and brocade dressing up the elegant guest rooms. ■

Holy Mole

SPICING UP LIFE WITH MEXICO'S SAUCY DISH

MOLE POBLANO, a complex mixture of chocolate, chilies, nuts, and spices, is among the most revered dishes in Mexican cooking. Nearly every grandmother in Puebla, the dish's hometown, has her own rendition of the semisweet, earthy sauce, typically made with more than 20 ingredients. Mole poblano's disputed origins may date to either a 17th-century nun at the city's famed Convent of Santa Rosa de Lima or to the pre-Columbian Aztecs, whose Nahuatl word for sauce is *molli*. The purest experience of this classic fare is the most traditional: in an *abuela's* kitchen, ladled over a roasted turkey drumstick. For those without a poblana grandmother, the best alternative is the no-frills **Fonda La Mexicana**, a 56-year-old institution in Puebla's downtown, where a single chicken leg is served with rice, radishes, and a lake of dark mole poblano sprinkled with sesame seeds. On weekends, families sit beneath paper flags as waiters deliver cold cervezas and extra tortillas for sopping up the sauce. Contemporary chefs are showcasing mole poblano in the country's inventive haute cuisine. Try the four-course tasting menu at **El Mural de los Poblanos**, which has one of Puebla's best mescal liquor selections. Better yet, let the restaurant's chef, Liz Galicia, teach you to make your own mole poblano. For a deeper education, take **Eat Mexico's** mole tour, which includes a trip to the market. —FREDA MOON



Mole poblano pools around a piece of chicken in the colonial town of Puebla, Mexico.



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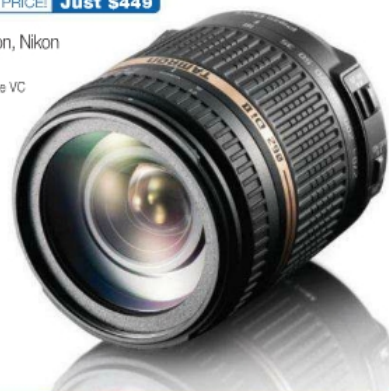
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Toronto's Urban Co

*Canada's largest city
goes from bland to bold*

BY *Katrina Onstad*
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Susan Seubert



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The Drake Hotel is a nexus of culture in Queen West. In its café, books create a cozy backdrop for afternoon cocktails.

I hear the crowd before I see it, gleeful squeals punctuating the early autumn evening. Such is the sound track of Toronto during TIFF, the Toronto International Film Festival, where celebrity sightings and red-carpet mobs come to seem normal for ten days every September. ¶ Though I'm on my way home for dinner, I'm compelled to bike toward the roar outside Roy Thomson Hall, the sloping glass theater on the edge of the financial district in Toronto's downtown. There, hundreds of arms wave like a field of flowers, cellphones aloft. From the very back of the tumult, I crane my neck and catch glimpses of camera crews and a blur of well-dressed bodies. Nearby, an older woman sits on a bench with a little white dog. ¶ "What's going on?" I ask. ¶ "Brad Pitt," she says. ¶ "You're not going to try to get closer?" ¶ "Nah," she says. "There'll be someone else tomorrow night. I'm just walking my dog."

Her unfazed attitude seems as typically Toronto as the giddy crowd: The city is getting used to being at the center of things. Toronto and TIFF have practically grown up side by side. A modest art house affair 20 years ago, TIFF is now the world's largest—and some say, most influential—public film festival. In the same period, Canada's biggest city, on the northwestern shores of Lake Ontario, has gone from being known as "Toronto the Good"—a euphemism for dull—to being a wildly cosmopolitan city. Nearly half of Toronto's citizens were born outside Canada. As Lisa Ray, an actress of Indian-Polish descent raised in Toronto, tells me: "We're the most successful social experiment in the world."

Even urban planning guru Richard Florida agrees. In 2007, Florida, who grew up near Newark, New Jersey, left Carnegie

Mellon in Pittsburgh to become a professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. His best-selling 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, heralds successful cities as those that attract and keep a creative citizenry who trade in innovation and ideas rather than old smokestack industry. Toronto is a perfect manifestation of his "Three T's" index of good city building: technology, tolerance, and talent.

I'm curious to see how the Three T's of Toronto play out on the streets, so I invite five local "creative class" guides to show me the neighborhoods they love. Toronto is known as a city of neighborhoods, and one of these pockets is new, one is very old (well, old for a town that wasn't incorporated until 1834), and all are vibrant reflections of a self-assured city that's finally come into its own.





A colorful community with an independent streak, Kensington Market (above) is a national historic site. Toronto's downtown region connects some 20 neighborhoods. The Center Island ferry (opposite) offers a panoramic view, topped by CN Tower.

Kensington Market

Global party mix in a heritage neighborhood

Clement Virgo, all six feet of him, cuts a striking figure in his jean jacket, hands in pockets and collar up, bargaining in a Kensington Market fish shop. The owner asks after Virgo's son, and Virgo walks

out with a smile and a discount on his black cod fillet. "It's a small town," says Virgo, one of Canada's most revered writers and directors of film and TV. Kensington is also one of the oldest neighborhoods in Toronto, a protected heritage site spanning several scruffy blocks west of Spadina, a major north-south artery that crosses the city and burrows into the heart of Chinatown. As you walk around on



Street markets bustle in Chinatown (left) and lattes steam at the Mascot, a coffee shop in Queen West (above). Don Valley Brick Works (below) has become part of a city park.



a weekend, it helps to keep your elbows out to steer through the crowds. People line up for empanadas; racks of vintage clothing huddle next to independent cafés where the pierced and tattooed get their caffeine hits.

Virgo came to Toronto from Jamaica at the age of 11 with his mother, brother, and two sisters. He grew up mostly in Regent Park, a public housing project on the east side of the city, but whenever he could, he'd ride to Kensington on the streetcar (Toronto has a subway system, but downtown is best navigated by "red rocket" streetcars). "I loved walking past musicians playing Spanish music, reggae. I'd hear people speaking Portuguese, Jamaican patois. It's a piling on." He's lived in and around the area for almost 20 years.

Virgo leads me to Caribbean Corner, a grocery store on Baldwin Street. Virgo's mom used to take him here as a kid; it's still his go-to for Jamaican spices and jerk sauce. But what he wants to show me today is outside: "Look," he says, pointing to a Star of David carved into the sidewalk by the doorway, a reminder of the time nearly a century ago when the neighborhood was predominantly Jewish.

"I have a mixed-race six-year-old who knows how to order sushi and burritos," he says. "The Market is the city I want to live in."

Residents are ferociously protective of Kensington, once the core of Toronto's punk rock scene. There's no Starbucks (Virgo says the best locally roasted coffee is Ideal's, and the best place to drink coffee and people-watch is Casa Acoreana), and there's only one small chain grocery store. We pass the Waterfalls Indian Tapas Bar: "This is where Nike tried to get in," says Virgo. In 2002, a club opened up that seemed like a typical indie music bar but proved to be a promotional vehicle for Nike. When locals got wind of the invasion, some repeatedly left garbage on the club's doorstep to protest Nike's foreign labor practices. The Swoosh packed up and left.

Down the street is El Trompo, Virgo's favorite *taquito* joint, where he eats a heaping plate of *huevos con chorizo*. This is hangover food, which might be necessary if one follows Virgo's advice and hits the Embassy Bar on the last Saturday of every month. "It's a bit like a speakeasy," he says. DJs spin and local reggae musicians share the microphone. In the summers, the doors open and the sound of reggae spills over into Bellevue Square Park down the street.

Kensington Market borders Toronto's Chinatown, and Virgo wants to visit the movie theater where he used to watch Hong Kong action flicks as a kid, awakening a lust for film that would lead him to make features like *Poor Boy's Game* and to direct episodes of *The Wire*.

Much of the Chinese population, like many ethnic communities in Toronto, has migrated to the suburbs, but on this brisk fall day, Chinatown is still teeming with people. A waiter dumps vats of steaming water into the gutter by the side of the street, letting loose an aroma of fish. When we get to the former site of the Golden Harvest theater, near the corner of Dundas and Spadina, it's a bubble-tea shop.

"Is there still a theater in the back?" Virgo asks the apron-wearing woman behind the counter. "Can we see it?" He's got Hong Kong director John Woo on the brain. Behind the counter, through a plywood door, is a staircase that looks suspiciously cinematic. Oddly, the woman shuts the door so we can't peek in.

"Nothing here! Bubble tea!"

It's a strange moment, and Virgo laughs. "Everything changes," he says.

Evergreen Brick Works

New life for a former industrial wasteland

Change, however, can sometimes go unnoticed by locals. The downside of the "city of neighborhoods" is that in Toronto, people often don't leave their own. In the spirit of investigating one of Toronto's newest areas, I find myself early one Saturday morning on a free shuttle bus to the Evergreen Brick Works.

The Don Valley was once the mouth of a glacial river. Now this green strip of land divides the eastern and western halves of the city. Years ago, I lived nearby, and I'd take long runs through the ravines into the valley as the traffic rumbled on the surrounding freeways. It never failed to astound me that only minutes from downtown, I could spot a rabbit, or a lone fisherman trying to get the Don River to give up a carp.

The recent opening of the Evergreen Brick Works, the revitalized site of the abandoned Don Valley Brick Works, has turned the valley into a hot destination. For years, the massive smokestacks and kilns sheltered squatters and served as a practice canvas for graffiti artists. But a charity called Evergreen reclaimed the ignored lands, turning them into an area of "nonprofit urban sustainability." Not really knowing what this means, I discover as soon as I get off the bus at the basin of the Don Valley that the eco-jargon translates into a fun Saturday morning. Joggers have ended their runs at the farmers market, making up for burned calories with french fries and artisanal cheeses.

Behind the market, in the Children's Garden, kids crawl in a wood fort and dig for worms. Mountain bikers who have survived the trails lean against buildings, soaking up a blast of sun. It's so pleasant that I'm not even annoyed by the guy with the didgeridoo.

"The Brick Works isn't some hippie-dippie experiment," says Brad Long, the gravelly voiced chef who runs the Brick Works restaurant Café Belong. "OK, it's an experiment, but it's not crazy." Pause. "Well, crazy in a good way."

Long is one of Toronto's celebrity chefs—his past as a journeyman rock musician makes him highly telegenic

and delightfully profane. Absorbing hellos from everyone he passes, Long walks me up a hill to point out the paths that wind through the grass from the neighborhoods above, a 26-mile walking circle. In the summer, wildflowers bloom on once toxic soil. "Come at night," says Long. "The whole city is alight."

Before this, Long ran the restaurant at the Air Canada Centre sports arena, bringing organic fare to Toronto Raptors and Maple Leafs and feeding haute cuisine to high rollers in the box seats. But after years struggling with the environmental footprint left by how we eat, he quit the ACC to open Café Belong, which strives to use local, organic, responsibly sourced ingredients.

The repurposed decor features exposed wood over an open kitchen, with tall windows looking across at the graffiti-splattered walls of a factory (the graffiti at Brick Works are legally protected). Long points out reclaimed design elements in the infrastructure and talks up his sustainable initiatives, such as rain-barrel water sourcing. In locavore spirit, Long buys his produce from the same farmers who set up their stalls on Saturday mornings. "People ask me: *What is Canadian food?* It's the beauty of our natural resources, used in this incredibly multicultural way."

The menu is always changing, but this season, critics are hailing the pork belly glazed in maple syrup and apple cider vinegar. To

It never failed to astound me that minutes from downtown, I could spot a rabbit, or a lone fisherman trying to get the Don River to give up a carp.



get through the Canadian winters with flavor; Long is also experimenting with pickling.

Pickling has always seemed apocalyptic to me; it's how we'll eat at the end of the world, which doesn't seem so delicious. But I order the pickle plate, and what appears is a sampling, including pears, carrots, and chokecherries, each uniquely flavored. My ladylike nibbling quickly becomes inelegant wolfing. The eggplant in a madras sauce has a complicated, revelatory spiciness. "I'll admit I've taken a jar of that home after work and eaten the whole thing before bed," says the server. It's even better washed down with a dry white wine from Stratus in the nearby Niagara region.

For the diners, the emphasis is on taste, not sustainability. "I tell my staff to shut up," says Long. "You can scare people by explaining provenance. It's too much information. We give them good food with value and ambience, and the trick is to get the hell out of the way."

Queen West

Artfully reimagined for the next generation

There's only so much green a city dweller can take before she must get back to street level. No neighborhood better embodies Toronto's urban cool than Queen West, and that's an entirely biased opinion, as it's been my home for nine years. Queen Street runs east-west from one end of the city to the other, but Queen West is generally considered the chunk west of Bathurst, ending near the Gladstone Hotel, around Dufferin Street (somewhere on that westward walk,

Room 318 in the Gladstone Hotel outlines visions in blue and white (left). Jatinder and Sarbjeet Singh share a moment at Chandan Fashion, their Gerrard Bazaar boutique (opposite).







Perhaps more than any other neighborhood, Queen West channels Toronto's creative spirit. The Drake Hotel (above) keeps the bohemian vibe alive in the gallery district. Near Queen West, a band makes joyful noise at the Communist's Daughter (below).



perhaps near the bucolic Trinity Bellwoods Park, street signs tell us we're supposed to call it West Queen West, but it seems that nobody really bothers).

The Gladstone Hotel, built in 1889, stands as a proud landmark dividing Queen West from neighboring Parkdale. It's a regal Richardsonian Romanesque building with arched windows and red brick, but only a decade ago the best way to describe it was decrepit—a leaky eyesore known for its hand-operated elevator and karaoke night filled with hipsters and long-term hotel guests. The Zeidler family took control of the hotel in 2002, and daughter Christina Zeidler oversaw the Gladstone's delicate overhaul, making careful efforts not to displace staff and residents while simultaneously saving the dying building, inch by inch.

"It's transformed, but that's not the purpose of it," says Zeidler, sitting in the Melody Bar by a curling mahogany bar from the 1940s. "The purpose was to respond to a neighborhood. I like the idea of revitalization, trying to bring the building back to life, back to the community, make it a hub. I don't feel as if it belongs to me. I feel it belongs to the community."

Two blocks east on Queen, the Drake Hotel has been similarly restored, to a slightly more upscale end. Both hotels present exhibits and events. The art scene in Toronto has usually been a movable feast, but for several years, Queen West has held fast as a gallery row. The Gladstone now offers an arts walking tour of the area. "The wish and hope is that the art scene will remain here as a vital, living part of the city," says Zeidler.

An artist herself, Zeidler sensed the lack of venues for Toronto's creative population, so she hired hungry local artists to give each of the 37 rooms at the Gladstone its own feel: pretty in pink in the Teen Queen, or streamlined sparse in the El-e-men-tal room.

The success of the Drake and the Gladstone has coincided with—or caused?—a boom in the surrounding neighborhood. Zeidler and I take a walk along Queen Street east from the Gladstone, Zeidler peering in the windows of her favorite galleries, starting with Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects, a showcase for up-and-coming artists. Stephen Bulger waves at Zeidler from the window of his gallery, which specializes in photography. The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA) is tucked away behind a parking lot. Outside the gallery for the Ontario Crafts Council, Zeidler looks through the glass: "Oh, I love that," she says, pointing at a small ceramic forest of white sticks.

A woman unlocking her bicycle nearby overhears and says, "It's called 'Dancing Chromosomes.' I made it." She turns out to be a ceramist named Chari Cohen. Still wearing her bike helmet, she and Zeidler, who have never met, discuss what might be a better word for crafts. "I'm thinking 'material arts,'" says Zeidler, whose dream of a living arts community feels very real.

Gerrard Bazaar

The colors of India along an ever evolving street

Far from the cool of Queen West, a few miles to the northeast, is the Gerrard Bazaar, sometimes called Little India. This six-block stretch along Gerrard Street, in an otherwise quiet, working-class neighborhood, sparkles at night with saris swinging from the awnings and gold bangles twinkling in the windows of the jewelry stores. Incense tickles the throat. "This street was our umbilical cord to India in the eighties," says Lisa Ray.

Ray grew up with her Polish mother and Indian father in a sleepy suburb of the city but became a supermodel in Mumbai when she was still in her teens. In 2005, she starred in the Academy Award-nominated film *Water* (in which she played an ostracized widow), and she has spent most of her adult life in Mumbai, New York, London, Paris, Milan, and Los Angeles. "The Toronto of my youth was wound tight—very conservative, very insecure. There was no hunger for greatness," she says.

Her return was dramatic: In 2009, Ray developed a rare form of cancer called multiple myeloma and found herself settling into Toronto more permanently. She's in good health now, but she has stuck around. "I'm not thinking I want to be anywhere else anymore." And anyway, she says, "it's a very Canadian thing to make your name somewhere else and then come back home."

As we walk down Gerrard late one morning, the sari stores are yet to open, and the mannequins are wrapped in black sheaths, eerily resembling Benedictine monks in the sunlight. Ray points to a group of people in a jewelry store, the older women in saris,

the younger in jeans. "That's definitely a bride getting bling for her wedding," she says.

Ray stops in front of a clothing store where a faded old sign reads "House of 220." "People would buy toasters and ghetto blasters with Indian wiring to send to family back home as gifts," she says, remembering crowds lining up out the door during the holidays. While her dad was buying small appliances, young Lisa would pore over glossy Bollywood magazines and scour the stores for Indian products like coconut oil and herbal remedies.

Now, of course, the South Asian diaspora—much of it settled in the suburbs—can get its information about the homeland from the Internet and order a toaster online. But Gerrard Street remains a fine example of what Richard Florida calls an "ethnic enclave," an immigrant community built around cultural identity, where the streets mirror the inhabitants' country of origin.

"For Indians who come here, the neighborhood is a kind of nostalgia for nostalgia," says Ray.

Though still bustling, the strip has a slightly shabby mien beneath the superficial glitz, with more abandoned storefronts than there used to be. The neighborhood's "Little India" nickname isn't even entirely accurate anymore; these days, merchants are Pakistani as well as Indian. An Islamic bookstore and an Indian sweetshop sit on the same block.

But the restaurants are still hopping, and that's why people travel to Gerrard from across the city. We pass Motimahal, with its fast-food seats, and stop at the Lahore Tikka House, with psychedelic-colored *tuk-tuks* outside and walls draped in mirrored fabrics inside. It's like a Russian nesting doll: rooms within rooms and a seemingly endless basement.

Our waiter, whose hair is dyed the color of an orange Popsicle, serves our biryani on Styrofoam plates with plastic cutlery. "Always get the chicken tikka," says Ray, sipping Limca, an Indian soda.

Ray talks about her friends in Toronto, many of whom she made since returning. I tell her Richard Florida calls Toronto "messy urbanism" in action: imperfect coexistences all around, man and nature, bikes and cars, religions and cultures atop one another—but always livable. Ray rolls her eyes at the word.

"There should be something more romantic and fanciful and passionate to describe Toronto than 'livable,'" she says. "Can't we call Toronto sexy yet?"

"There should be something more romantic and passionate to describe Toronto than 'livable.' Can't we call Toronto sexy yet?"



Leslieville

At the corner of sassy and folksy

But “livable” is the buzzword for a neighborhood called Leslieville, just south of Little India along Queen Street’s east end. Torontonians bristle at New York comparisons, so I’ll say it fast and duck: If hip, established Queen West is the West Village, then cheap, cheerful, and DIY Queen East is Brooklyn—its more livable cousin.

But not long ago, Leslieville had a reputation for poverty and crime. Nathalie-Roze Fischer is a French-Canadian-Haitian-Italian Torontonian (self-description: “Canadian mutt”) who set up a clothing and accessories shop, Nathalie-Roze and Co., in 2006, renting an apartment nearby. “My mom said: ‘You’ll be mugged!’”

Fischer was ahead of the curve. Leslieville has become the best destination for shoppers who eschew chains. In part, Leslieville grew to serve the film industry. At the south end of the neighborhood, closer to Lake Ontario, massive studios host film and TV shows in production, lured by the city’s tax credits. Leslievillers are used to streets blocked off with cones and trailers—streets that could pass for New York or Chicago.

Nathalie-Roze and Co. champions Canadian designers and offers crafts courses at night. Fischer shows me canvas bags and buttons that flag-wave for the neighborhood: “Leslieville is for Lovers” and “Lesbiville.”

We settle down to brunch at linoleum-topped tables at kitschy Lady Marmalade (Torontonians are committed brunchers). Over French toast, Fischer describes her clientele as “renegade, self-employed, and wired.”

The day before we met, the coffee shop Mercury Espresso hosted a “pop-up” food event, announcing on Twitter that two chefs were coming to sell Cuban sandwiches and sticky toffee pudding for ten bucks. “I basically ran over there,” Fischer says with a laugh.

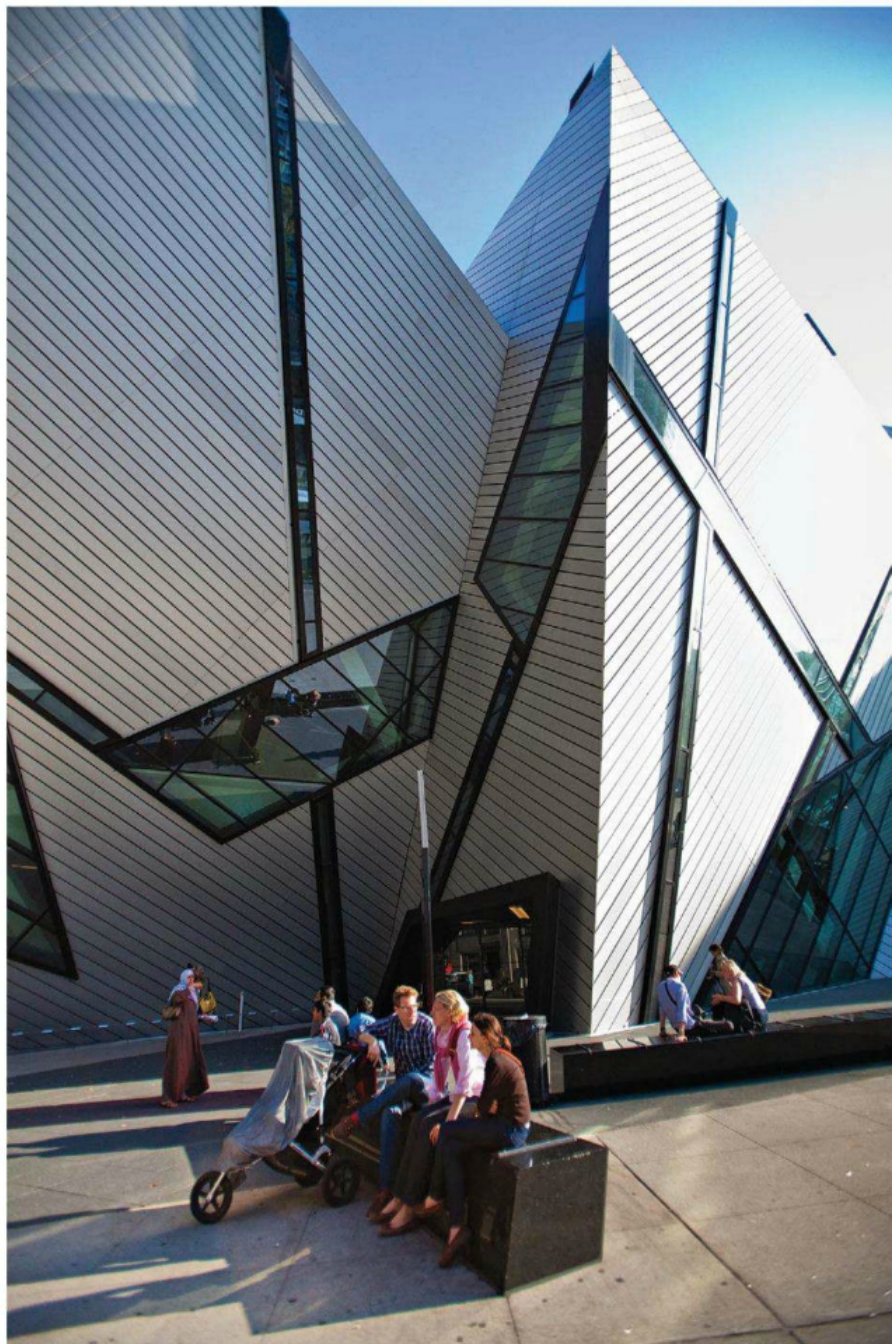
As we walk along Queen East, past furniture and clothing stores, we hit two different “Back in ten minutes” signs. The streets are wide and tree-lined. “It’s a nine-block town. All the things you want from a big city, but you have this genuine charm. There’s no attitude; no one checks out your shoes before they serve you. Not that that’s happening on Queen West, but...” She trails off, hinting at a playful east-west rivalry.

The neighborhood of early 20th-century duplexes has attracted young families priced out of more established areas. The streets are crowded with baby strollers, and retailers want them to roll in. At Doll Factory by Damzels, a store showcasing the rock-and-roll in-house fashion line Damzels in This Dress, Ramones onesies share shelf space with feather-covered boots. Baby on the Hip carries designer slings and pacifiers so pretty they look like sculptures.

Fischer advises checking out Leslieville’s many vintage design stores. We stop longest in Love the Design, a curated curiosity shop. I covet a pair of shiny reindeer antlers before being distracted by beautiful handmade stationery.

When the stores close, the bars and restaurants open. Worn-out shoppers can dine at Ascari Enoteca, a wildly popular wine bar and pasta restaurant where images of famed Italian Formula One driver Alberto Ascari peek out from every surface. At the east end of Leslieville is the hobbit-like Ceili Cottage, a Celtic bar with live music in a shack with oyster shells cemented into the walkway. This past winter, the owner kept people coming to the popular outdoor patio by erecting a yurt there instead, with seating for up to 30.

Nightlife continues at a local watering hole, the Avro, where you’re likely to encounter a whimsical theme event, such as letter-writing night or an all-Canadian-albums party (you must love Corey Hart to endure this). I decide to have a beer at the bar, where I spot



World culture and natural history are on display at the Royal Ontario Museum (above) in a daringly angular space designed by architect Daniel Libeskind. Vintage furniture is stacked at Guff, an eye-catching store in Leslieville (opposite).

a jar of glittering loonies and toonies (one- and two-dollar Canadian coins) on the counter. I ask why it is there. “It’s our community jar, for local projects like gardens and art,” says the bartender.

Sitting on my barstool in quiet Leslieville, I’m aware that I am in micro-Toronto, a neighborhood village sprung into existence by the creative industry, at least in part. Meanwhile, in a different village in this same city, A-list celebrities are celebrating an international film festival. Toronto is a tale of many cities—in one.

Toronto-based writer **KATRINA ONSTAD**’s second novel, *Everybody Has Everything*, will be published in June. *Traveler contributing photographer* **SUSAN SEUBERT** lives in Portland, Oregon, and Maui.

The Gold

The mountains of Peru hold an Andean treasure—the gossamer wool of the vicuña

*Peruvian highlanders
round up wild vicuñas,
continuing a tradition
of their Inca forebears.*

By KIM MACQUARRIE *Photographs by* BETH WALD

den Yarn



I'm

running through a field at 15,000 feet in the remote Puno Province in Peru's southern Andes. Craggy mountains and blue glaciers fill the distance. Suddenly, a group of 30 vicuñas—wild, long-necked cousins of llamas, alpacas, and guanacos—stampedes toward me. I should be better prepared. ¶ I'm taking part in a *chaccu*, or roundup, of wild vicuñas with more than 300 Andean herders.

Vicuñas are valued for their precious wool, considered one of the finest natural fibers in the world and sometimes referred to as “Andean gold.” The plan is to surround the vicuñas—hundreds of them—with an enormous human circle, then draw the loop tight to slowly corral them, taking care to not stress them. It's a method of capture that was used by the Inca centuries ago and reintroduced recently after vicuñas rebounded from near extinction.



Festively dressed Quechua women (above) share a laugh in the Andean village of Chinchero. Ruins of a fortified Inca settlement (right) hold fast to the mountainsides around Ollantaytambo, once a stronghold of Inca resistance to Spanish conquest.

Although I'm helping with the roundup, I am not here to capture a vicuña myself. I'm after the soft textiles that are crafted with vicuña wool by local weavers

Almost too late, I notice that a big gap has opened in the line—and that a herd of the cinnamon-colored animals is racing for it. I look around and realize I'm the only person to plug it. Instinctively, I raise my hands and run forward along the steep

terrain, tripping over thick yellow tufts of *ichu* grass and sucking in what little oxygen I can from the thin Andean air. Just as I arrive at the gap, the vicuñas veer off in the opposite direction. A local woman in a long pleated skirt, her black hair gathered in two braids, flashes me a smile. I now am a link in a human chain that stretches for several miles across the Andes.

My desire for vicuña wool took hold a

quarter of a century ago in the old Inca town of Cusco, high in the Andes. I am an anthropologist and, by nature, a collector; my house in Colorado is decorated with bows and arrows from the Amazon, hand-carved masks from Papua New Guinea, and silk woven in Laos—all acquired on trips I took. While exploring Peru in the 1980s, I learned that high-quality handcrafted weavings were made only 20 or 30 years





Clockwise from top left: A curandero (healer) performs a blessing ceremony for the chaccu, or vicuña roundup. Young vicuñas wait to be joined in a symbolic “marriage.” Balls of yarn are ready for the loom. Puno musicians celebrate a successful chaccu.

earlier. Traditional weaving techniques—handed down through generations for hundreds of years—were rapidly dying out.

One evening, in a small store in Cusco, I was looking through a stack of weavings when the woman who owned the store said quietly, “The Inca wore clothes made with alpaca wool, but the Inca emperor, who was considered a god, wore vicuña.”

“Do you have anything made with vicuña wool?” I immediately asked.

“No,” she said sadly. “The vicuñas have almost disappeared because of hunting. No one has woven anything with their wool in decades.”

Ever since that exchange I have wanted to find a weaving made with vicuña wool. So imagine my delight when I heard from a friend not only that traditional weaving has been revived in Peru but also that the

vicuña population has rebounded. It was time to make a return journey.

CUSCO, ONE OF MY FAVORITE cities in the world, sits at an altitude of 11,200 feet. It is studded with some of the finest Inca ruins in South America, thanks to having been the capital of the Inca Empire—before Spanish conquistadores appropriated and colonized the lands of Peru. I walk down one of Cusco’s narrow stone-paved streets, my hand drifting over an Inca wall. The smooth blocks are so tightly fitted that even 500 years after they were put in place you can’t slip a pin between them.

I stop in a café, winded and with a mild headache from the high altitude. The lady behind the counter persuades me to forgo coffee and instead try *mate de coca*, a tea made with an infusion of coca leaves—the

same leaves from which cocaine is produced (the infusion releases only a small amount of the stimulant into the tea).

“If you have an altitude headache,” she says with concern, “this is the best thing.” I down one cup, then another. Soon I feel good enough to wander the sun-splattered Saturday craft market, where vendors are selling armadillo-shell charangos (small guitars), carved gourds, and reproductions of Inca vases in rusts, browns, charcoals, and reds. Textiles are few here, however; for those I will need to find my way to Cusco’s celebrated Center for Traditional Textiles.

I discover it down Avenida del Sol, by the Inca sun temple of Qoricancha, a massive compound with exceptional Inca stonework. Entering a large room, I see weavings piled on shelves and hanging from walls. In the rear I notice six women sitting on the



Clockwise from top left: Andean textiles showcase indigenous designs. Halloween finds costumed participants on the streets of Arequipa. Corn, long cultivated in the Andes, is sold in a rainbow of colors. A weaver spins vicuña wool in a highland village.

floor conversing in Quechua as they work their backstrap looms, which are tied to a central wooden post. The women have braided black hair and wear clothes dyed various hues of red, blue, and ocher. I watch as their nimble fingers create intricate weavings from spools of dyed yarn.

"Do you have any weavings made with vicuña wool?" I ask the attendant.

"No. Everything in here is woven from alpaca or sheep's wool."

"Why is that?"

"Because," she explains, "vicuña wool is so expensive."

THE NEXT MORNING I BOARD a bus for an hour-long ride northwest to Chinchero, an Inca settlement famous for its textiles, where I am to ask for Nilda Callañaupa Álvarez, the Textile Center's founder. Today

she is at the center's Chinchero weaving cooperative (the center now works in nine communities). She will know where I can find vicuña weavings. The bus winds past fields where farmers still slice the earth with wooden plows pulled by oxen. It's potato-planting season, and the fields are brown with furrows. A woman seated across from me clutches a bag of small, lilac-colored potatoes that are almost as wrinkled as her hands. I ask her what kind they are. I know that potatoes were first cultivated in the Andes some 8,000 years ago—and that the region grows a mind-numbing 5,000 varieties. But I have almost no ability to distinguish between them.

"Chuños," she says smiling, revealing two gold-capped upper teeth. "For soup." Chuños are potatoes that have been left outside to freeze repeatedly, then are dried

under the sun. Freeze-drying, in fact, was likely invented in the Andes. The woman hands me a three-inch-long chuño. It's as light as a piece of Styrofoam.

A half hour later we pull into Chinchero. Old Inca walls punctuated with trapezoidal alcoves line the colonial town center, which is framed by whitewashed buildings and tiled roofs. I make my through a portal to the open-air market, where women in colorful skirts, shawls, and broad-rimmed hats have set out their weavings and wares. They sit patiently beside their offerings, ready to bargain. Visitors mill about, some haggling, others walking off with brightly embroidered bags or square weavings called *llicllas* in Quechua.

A few blocks away, down a narrow road, I spot a sign by a double door announcing the cooperative. Inside I find Callañaupa



Twilight brings crowds to the Plaza de Armas—and its neoclassical cathedral—in Arequipa, a center for Andean textiles.

giving a weaving demonstration to a large group of foreign weavers. In the distance, the Urubamba mountain range—some of its jagged peaks capped by ice—rises from the Sacred Valley of the Inca, which is watered by a river the Inca considered holy.

“You can create a dye in any quantity you like,” Callañaupa, who is Quechua and was born in Chinchero, is telling her audience in Spanish-accented English. “But be certain to use the same proportions. Once the dye is heated, it’s ready.”

I watch her place bundles of spun white alpaca wool into a metal vat now bubbling with hot black dye made from a fungus. The guest weavers take notes or use their video recorders to film the scene. As Callañaupa stirs the vat, she tells the story of how she rescued the knowledge of this black dye from a remote community she visited in the Andes.

“There was only one elderly man who remembered how this dye was made,” she narrates, churning the black brew with a long wooden stake. “He took me into the jungle and showed me a plant. I noticed it had a black fungus growing on it. They had not used that fungus for dye in years.”

A spry Canadian attendee named Judith Crosbie notices that I’m taking notes and

nudges me. In a low voice she says, “Nilda really has rescued ancient Andean weaving techniques. She saved these old methods. Every weaving on sale here is handmade from natural materials. And designed with traditional patterns.”

Out in the courtyard, the women from the cooperative begin serving lunch. One, wearing a red-and-black outfit typical of Chinchero, hands me a plate of roasted guinea pig with a side of small, freeze-dried chuño potatoes; guinea pigs and chuño are to Andean Peru what cheeseburgers and fries are to the United States.

“Would you like a mate de coca?” she asks.

I nod, and she returns with a steaming cup and a big smile. The feeling here is of a large family reunion, the colorfully attired local women milling around drably dressed gringos like me.

The guinea pig is tasty but full of small bones. As I pick through them, Tim Wells, a lean American artist from California, takes a seat next to me.

“I began coming here in the late 1990s,” he shares. “Back then, younger weavers were producing synthetic weavings because the tourists mostly couldn’t tell the difference. Those weavers were able to turn out in a few days something a traditional weaver might

spend a month on. Then Nilda showed up.”

Working carefully on his guinea pig, he fills me in on Callañaupa.

“When Nilda was younger she met an American anthropologist and his wife who were living here, and agreed to teach them how to weave. She would later be the first woman from Chinchero to finish university. I met her at a workshop she was attending in San Francisco.”

He puts his fork down.

“She’s a powerhouse. She has founded cooperatives in a number of communities and they have more business than they know what to do with.”

Eager to see more, I wander through the cooperative’s store, marveling at the textile patterns and rich, natural dyes, the interlaced warps and woofs of painstakingly woven threads. I purchase a large piece that was made in the community of Accha Alta. It’s a tightly woven lliclla of matching geometrical patterns in reds, pinks, burnt ambers, and leaf-colored greens. I know just where in my house I’ll display it. But as fine as the weaving is, I still covet the sort of weaving that was made for Inca emperors. A weaving made with vicuña wool.

I locate Callañaupa and blurt out my question.

"What about vicuña wool—are any of your weavers using it?"

"I wish we did, but it's too expensive," she says. "You will have to go where the vicuñas are. You will have to join a chaccu."

THAT IS HOW, A WEEK LATER, I find myself rounding up vicuñas in the Andes near the remote southern Peru village of Picotani. Within an hour of plugging the wall in our human circle, I watch as the vicuñas press together like cattle and turn surprisingly calm. They are herded easily into corrals arranged farther down the valley.

The following morning I rise early to see the shearing of the vicuñas for their soft wool. Men in woven ponchos and sandals soled with tire rubber capture the vicuñas one by one and lead them into an enclosure; most of the men sport a bulge of coca leaf in their cheeks, a sort of mild pick-me-up. I approach Juan José Vega Quispe, the gregarious regional director of agriculture, who is shaking hands with everyone. As the men trim the two-inch-thick fleece from each of the animals with electric shears, pulling the wool away as if stripping insulation from a wall, Vega shares some vicuña facts.

"It is estimated that around two million vicuñas lived in the Andes at the time of the Inca Empire; they were protected. Then the Spaniards arrived and started to hunt them down for their meat."

Vega steps forward suddenly to help two men bring a vicuña to the ground and hold it still. Over his shoulder he continues, "By the 1960s, perhaps 6,000 vicuñas were left in these high mountains."

Since that time, strict laws against hunting, the creation of a large reserve, and a ban on exporting vicuña wool have allowed vicuñas to stage a dramatic comeback.

"By 1981, Peru had 75,000 vicuñas," Vega says. "Today, we have nearly 190,000. It's a miracle," he exclaims, helping lift the newly shorn vicuña back to its feet.

The vicuñas rebounded so much, Vega tells me, that in 2003 Peru declared a national chaccu week to be held every June. As a result, nearly 200 chaccus are carried out each year.

Vega and I walk around the side of the shearing house as men working in pairs bring out shorn vicuñas that look almost naked without their fleece. The animals are let go one by one and bound directly for the brown hills, free again.

Back inside the enclosure I watch as a vicuña fleece is rolled up, placed in a plastic bag, labeled, and carefully weighed. I pick up another bag. It feels as light as gossamer; an entire vicuña fleece will weigh barely seven ounces.

"What do they do with it now?" I ask.

"These people are herders, not weavers," Vega reminds me. "The community sells the fleece, but the price is so high that local weavers can't afford it." Only a few places, Vega adds, have mastered the process of weaving vicuña wool on machines.

"If you want to find clothes made with

nearly \$7,000, shawls going for \$1,000, and scarves going for \$600. These prices are a third of what I would pay outside Peru.

I finger one garment; it feels like feather down. Irresistible. I choose a scarf displayed in a wooden box. With it comes a card that confirms the wool's provenance and charts the recent resurgence of the vicuña.

That night, I dine in a rustic restaurant called Sonccollay—a Quechua word loosely meaning "from the heart"—which looks out on Arequipa's 17th-century white stone cathedral and the landscaped Plaza de Armas. The restaurant bills itself as serving Inca and pre-Inca dishes. Its owner and chef, Walter Bustamante Cano, reminds me of the Spanish actor Javier Bardem.

"Everything we serve here is prepared the Inca way," says Bustamante, who clearly enjoys mingling with his customers. "We cook meat on lava stones using local herbs and spices." When I ask him how he learned these Inca cooking traditions, he fixes his dark-eyed gaze on me. "By studying Inca methods that are described in colonial Spanish chronicles, by traveling all over Peru, and by asking the farmers in the countryside."

I have my doubts about what meat cooked on lava stones will taste like, but on digging into an *entrada* of native pepper stuffed with corn compote, followed by a slab of alpaca meat served up with a side of roasted potatoes and squash, I realize that the Inca—at least the elite class—may have eaten quite well. The food is absolutely delicious.

Gazing out over the Plaza de Armas from my table, I open the wooden box that contains my new vicuña scarf—a scarf that any Inca emperor surely would have admired. And I cannot help but be thankful that the transformation of vicuña wool

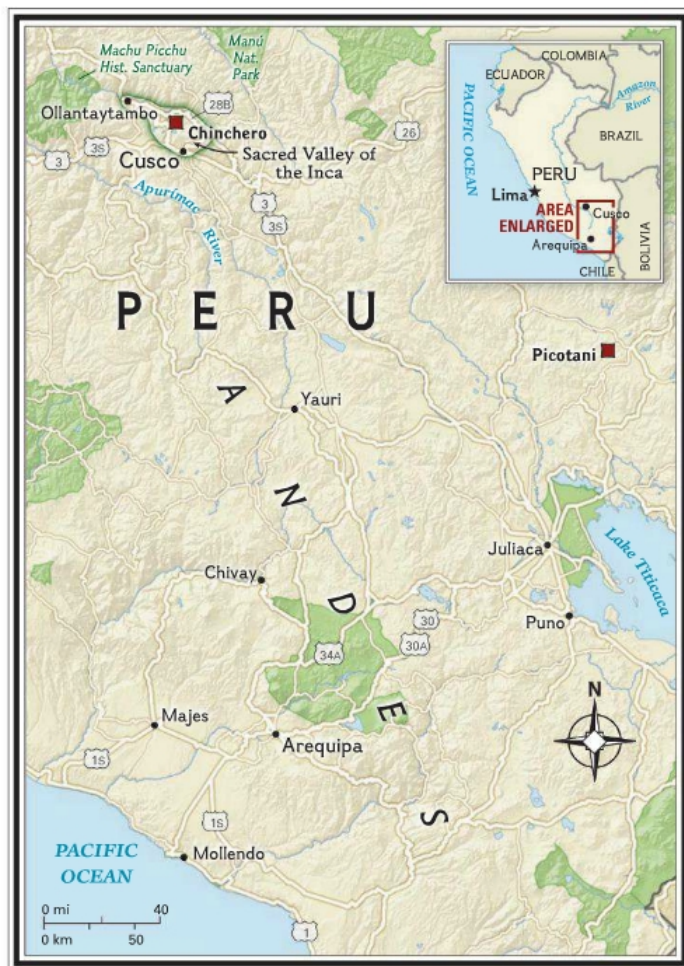
into textiles, along with other vanishing Andean traditions, has been so patiently rescued from the past. The world, I have no doubt, is richer for them.

Writer and anthropologist **KIM MACQUARRIE** is the author of *The Last Days of the Incas*. Photographer **BETH WALD** has traveled and shot extensively in South America.

READ IT, DO IT



Travel to Peru—and meet weaver and NG grantee Nilda Callañaupa—with National Geographic Expeditions. www.ngexpeditions.com/peru.



vicuña wool, you should visit Arequipa. That's where a lot of it ends up."

A few days later, following his advice, I arrive in Arequipa, a colonial city in Peru's southern Andes. Ringed by active volcanoes, Arequipa is constructed almost entirely of white volcanic stone.

Near the main square, Plaza de Armas, I spot Kuna, an upscale store that sells high-quality alpaca clothing and, I've been told, clothing crafted with vicuña wool. Amid stacks of shawls and sweaters woven with alpaca wool I discover an alcove displaying what I've traveled thousands of miles to see: garments made with premium cinnamon-colored vicuña wool.

I eye vicuña-wool capes that are going for

*A campsite, with camels,
in Kenya's Samburu
National Reserve.*

EX



The Year of Exploration

**The World's Best
Guided Trips**

**125TH
ANNIVERSARY
SPECIAL**

BY MARGARET LOFTUS



he golden age of exploration continues: 125 years after the birth of National Geographic, after Hiram Bingham rediscovered Machu Picchu, after Jane Goodall observed that chimps fashioned their own tools, after Spencer Wells used genetic data to trace the human family tree, explorers continue to extend the frontiers of geography and science. ¶ Travelers have joined the movement, pushing beyond the boundaries of mainstream tourism, exploring the planet as

never before. One difference between explorers past and present is the means by which we document and share the experience. “Unlike the last century when exploration was in many ways a preserve of a small elite, in the 21st century it’s shared, creative, open, and collaborative,” notes Daniel Raven-Ellison, a geographer and one of National Geographic’s emerging explorers. ¶ To commemorate the occasion, we scoured the globe for the guided trips that best embody this inquisitive spirit. ¶ Exploration, after all, is not necessarily about going where no man has gone before. Says Raven-Ellison, “We all have our own frontiers to push, whether it be an expert spelunker venturing into a newly discovered cave system or a toddler dipping his toes in the Pacific for the first time. It is also an enormously powerful tool. Done in the right way it can bring knowledge, empathy, wealth, and peace to people and places.” ¶ Ready? Set? Explore.

AFRICA

KENYA

Walk for Elephants

The country’s Laikipia eco-system is home to one of the largest free-ranging elephant populations in East Africa, but the intensified, illicit hunt for ivory threatens to decimate it by 2020. Raise funds for a local anti-poaching initiative while trekking the stomping grounds of these beloved giants. Led by the company founders, this walkathon and camel-supported camping expedition covers up to 15 miles a day from Laikipia to the Kirisia Hills, led by Samburu guides.

Hidden Places Travel: “100 Miles for Elephants,” 9 days; \$3,450; www.hiddenplaces.net **N**

SOUTH AFRICA, BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA, ZAMBIA, ZIMBABWE

Giving Safari

Boutique safari specialist Priscilla Macy cherry-picked this five-country tour from the most raved-about components of her customized African itineraries, like the two nights spent aboard Ichobezi safari boats floating down the Chobe River. What makes the trip different are the philanthropic outings; one group took local children to see Victoria

Falls—a first for most of them. **Global Sojourns:** “Safari, Culture, and Philanthropy in Southern Africa,” 14 days; \$4,400; www.globalsojourns.com **A**

NAMIBIA

Conservation Corps

Live your *Wild Kingdom* dreams by lending a hand to scientists in the Khomas Hochland—the highlands of central Namibia—as they research ways to minimize conflict between humans and wildlife. Document behavior, set cameras and live traps, and perhaps even help capture and collar a big cat. **Biosphere**

Expeditions: “A Game of Cats and Elephants,” 13 days; \$2,780; www.biosphere-expeditions.org **N S V**

MOROCCO

Surfin’ Sahara

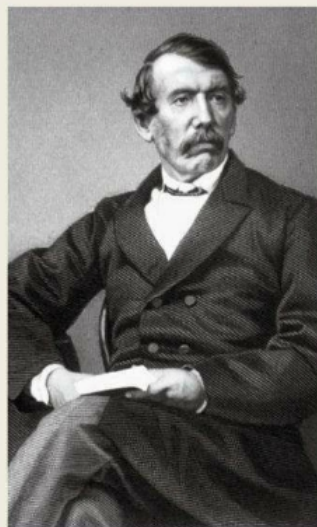
Few know that Morocco is home to some of the world’s sweetest and most reliable surf breaks. This trip is part surf camp, part cultural odyssey. Spend three days riding waves at a locals-mostly beach near Agadir—beginners welcome—then trek through Berber villages in the High Atlas Mountains and wander the souks and ruins of Marrakech. **Access Trips:** “Morocco Desert

DAG JOERING/HIDDEN PLACES TRAVEL (SAVANNA, PRECEDING PAGES); BOB KRIST/COMBIS (BOAT); DANIELA DELMONTE/GETTY IMAGES (DAVID LIVINGSTONE)

A dhow catches the breeze off Stone Town on the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar.



TANZANIA **Tracking Dr. Livingstone** After a series of earlier expeditions on the African continent, David Livingstone returned to Africa in 1866. He got his bearings in Zanzibar, where this tour also starts. You'll visit the former spice trade capital of Stone Town, as well as the house he stayed in. Next, it's off to Lake Tanganyika, Africa's deepest lake, which Livingstone helped map, and Ujiji, where journalist Henry Morton Stanley encountered the ailing explorer in 1871 and famously remarked, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." (At some point on his journey, Livingstone had lost contact with the outside world.) Several game drives are woven into the itinerary. **Africa Adventure Consultants:** *"In Livingstone's Footsteps: The Final Journey,"* 10 days; \$3,975; www.adventuresinafrica.com **N P**



THE LEGEND Born 200 years ago to working-class parents in Blantyre, Scotland, David Livingstone (1813-1873) went to Africa as a medical missionary but emerged as a mythical figure. His quest for the source of the Nile and mysterious four-year disappearance burnished his image in Victorian England and beyond.

Surf Safari," 8 days; \$2,140; www.accesstrips.com **N** **V**

EGYPT

New Nile Route

Plying a recently reopened route from Cairo to Aswan (or vice versa), this cruise aboard the luxe 32-cabin *Sanctuary Nile Adventurer* is a veritable survey of Egyptian history, from Abydos, an ancient city dedicated to Osiris and a burial place for early pharaohs, to the rock tombs of Beni Hassan, cut into the limestone cliffs of the Nile for provincial rulers during the Middle Kingdom. Onboard perks include lectures on Egyptology and classes on hieroglyphics and Egyptian cooking. **Sanctuary Retreats:** "Nile Adventurer," 10 days; \$3,440; www.sanctuaryretreats.com **C**

ETHIOPIA

Anthropology 101

This trip plumbs the exotic

depths of this diverse country mostly on foot. Visit Surma villages, where young men consume cattle's blood and milk and engage in ritual dances, while women insert clay discs into their lower lips as a rite of passage. Explore the remote Omo National Park, a tract of wilderness framed by massive cliffs of volcanic basalt and granite. **Journeys by Design:** "Trekking to Surma, Ethiopia," 13 days; \$3,363; www.journeysbydesign.com **P**

ASIA

JORDAN

Carpet Ride

Jordanian guide Yamaan Safady leads this journey he pioneered on Bedouin hunting paths through rugged desert, slot canyons, and mountainous terrain to the "back door" of Petra. Relax over evening meals of kebabs, hummus,

olives, and fresh pita bread in traditional Bedouin camps filled with tribal rugs and plush, overstuffed pillows. Your reward is a rare approach to the monastery and ancient city, rediscovered by Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt in 1812. **Wildland Adventures:** "Bedouin Trek to Petra," 12 days; \$4,995; www.wildland.com

OMAN

Under the Arab Sky

The frankincense trade made Ubar one of the richest cities on the Arabian Peninsula until the desert swallowed it without a trace, according to Arab lore. Poke around the ruins of what experts believe is the lost city in the vast sand of the Empty Quarter. The trip launches in exotic Muscat and traces the craggy coast of the sultanate before plunging into the interior. Bed down under the stars, in luxury mobile tents. **Big Five Tours and Expeditions:**

"Caravans of the Bedu," 12 days; \$15,000; www.bigfive.com **N** **P**

KYRGYZSTAN, CHINA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN

The Silk Road Less Traveled

Experience the historical trading route through the eyes of seminomadic people who host you: Share a vodka toast at a shepherd's camp on the glacial Song-Köl lake; overnight in a communal yurt where caravans rest in Tash-Rabat; and stay with an eagle hunter on the shores of Lake Issyk-Köl. **Wild Frontiers:** "Silk Road Odyssey," 23 days; \$4,869; wildfrontiers.co.uk

INDONESIA

Theoretical Cruise

Evolutionary ideas? Darwin wasn't the only one. Nineteenth-century British scientist Alfred Russel Wallace came up with similar theories after traveling widely in Malaysia and Indonesia, where he noted marked differences between the same animal species across a narrow strait in the archipelago (Wallace's line). Naturalist Tony Whitten narrates select voyages aboard the traditionally built 12-cabin schooner *Ombak Putih*, exploring the flora and fauna that inspired Wallace's work and commemorating the 100th anniversary of his death. **SeaTrek Sailing Adventures:** "Ternate-Halmahera-Morotai-Raja Ampat-Sorong," 12 days; \$4,750; www.seatrek-bali.com **C**

RUSSIA

Rushing Waters

Veteran guide Vladimir Gavrilov leads the adventure company's debut rafting expedition down the Chuya and Bashkaus Rivers and through rocky canyons deep in the expansive wilderness that is southern Siberia. In between running rapids (Class 3-4), explore the Altay villages of Saratan and Ust' Ulagan and check out the unique petroglyphs of the Chuya Trakt. **Northwest Rafting Company:** "European Body, Asian Soul: Chuya and Bashkaus River Expedition in Russia," 16 days; \$4,495; www.nwrafting.com **N**



In the Ourika Valley of Morocco's Atlas Mountains, Berber women prepare a meal.

WILLIAM TALENER

A mountaineer absorbs the sunset view of Everest in Khumbu, Nepal.



NEPAL Everest at 60 Traveling to Everest—even if only to its base—takes on special significance in 2013, the 60th anniversary of the first successful ascent of the mountain. Follow in the footsteps of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay through the village of Namche Bazaar and the glacial valley of Khunde; hike up Kala Pattar for a famous view of the Big E on the southwest ridge of Mount Pumori; and stand in awe of the Khumbu Icefall, which marks the South Col, the route blazed by the maverick climbers. Base camp awaits, buzzing with the excitement of the anniversary celebration, mountaineering expeditions preparing for summit bids, and the start of the annual Hillary and Tenzing marathon. **One World Trekking:** “Everest Base Camp 60th Anniversary Trek,” 18 days; \$3,360; www.oneworldtrekking.com



THE DREAM TEAM Paired by the British expedition team leader after months of preparation and scrutiny, New Zealand beekeeper Edmund Hillary (1919-2008) and Nepalese Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay (1914-1986) became the first men confirmed to have reached the 29,035-foot summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953.

TIMOR-LESTE Off the Radar

Officially split from Indonesia in 2002, Timor-Leste (East Timor) is one of the world's newest, and least touristed, countries. Visit this topographical and cultural wonderland with one of the few Western companies guiding trips there. Climb the 9,721-foot Mount Ramelau to take in the sunrise, hike through old-growth tropical forests looking for prehistoric rock paintings, and share *ikan sabuko* (fish cooked in banana leaves) with the villagers of Loi Huno. **Mountain Travel Sobek:** "Journey of Discovery in Timor-Leste," 12 days; \$3,495; www.mtsobek.com **N**

CAMBODIA Wild Mekong

The monuments of the Khmer civilization are the star attraction of Cambodia, but its wildlife and bird sanctuaries shouldn't be missed. See it all on this compelling itinerary; highlights are a balloon ride over Angkor Wat and a stint helping staff at the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre prepare food for its more than 100 resident sun bears. The Asia expert's nonprofit partner, READ Global, has established 689 libraries throughout the continent. **Myths**

and Mountains: "Untamed Cambodia," 14 days; \$2,995; www.mythsandmountains.com **N V**

MONGOLIA The Real Deal

Based on the 1920s expeditions of Roy Chapman Andrews—American Museum of Natural History director and the alleged inspiration for Indiana Jones—this journey traces the Beijing-Kalgan-Urga trail, used for centuries by camel caravans between China and Mongolia. In Gobi, your own caravan passes dunes and the Flaming Cliffs, where Andrews famously discovered the first fossilized dinosaur eggs the modern world had ever seen. **Nomadic Expeditions:** "Across Mongolian Plains," 16 days; \$8,960; www.nomadicexpeditions.com **N**

INDIA Temples and Tea

The cultural capital of India and onetime seat of the British Raj, Kolkata kicks off a quirky itinerary through the state of Orissa, home to numerous historic temples, notably Puri's 13th-century sandstone Sun Temple, which legend says was constructed by Lord Krishna's son, and the tea highlands, the summer stomping grounds of the raja. **Immersion Journeys:**

"East India: Temple Mythology and Mountain Peaks," 15 days; \$6,250; www.immersionjourneys.com **P N**

CHINA Oriental Banquet

Chinese food maven Fuchsia Dunlop guides chowhounds from Beijing to Shanghai to taste each region's specialties. There's Peking duck in the capital, Sichuan hot pot in Chengdu, and lamb skewers roasted over coals at Xi'an's Muslim Quarter market in the evening. Work up an appetite between meals with cooking demonstrations and visits to the regions' musts: the giant panda breeding center and the terra-cotta warriors. **WildChina:** "Gastronomic Tour of China," 13 days; \$6,880; www.wildchina.com

MYANMAR, BHUTAN Festival Finder

Here's the rare journey that pairs two of the world's best-preserved cultures. Tag along with Asia pro Denise Gogarty to experience traditional ceremonies of each: rites for novitiates at a Buddhist Burmese monastery, a lamp-lighting ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar (Burma), and the colorful masked dances of Bhutan's Thimphu Tshechu festival. **Cox and**

Kings: "Dream Trip—Burma and Bhutan," 14 days; \$8,520; www.coxandkingsusa.com **N**

JAPAN Ancient Way

Once trod by feudal lords and their entourages, the Nakasendo trail linking Tokyo and Kyoto grounds 21st-century travelers in timeless, rural Japan. Walk by day, stopping in the evening at one of the route's 69 preserved "post" villages for a hot-springs soak and overnight at a *ryokan*. And repeat. **Oxalis Adventures:** "Nakasendo Trail," 12 days; \$4,150; www.oxalis-adventures.com

EUROPE

MALTA, ITALY Ancient Sicily

The 65-passenger *Sea Cloud II* sets sail from Malta for an in-depth exploration of Sicily's ancient treasures, including the archaeological zone in Syracuse and the Greek temple and theater in Segesta. Adding context are onboard lectures from Temple University art history professor Frank Dabell and National Trust for Historic Preservation horticulturalist Patrick Bowe. In Syracuse, the group will visit the baroque palazzo of Baron Beneventano



A woman picks tea leaves by hand in Darjeeling, India.

MARC DOZIER/GETTY IMAGES

Venerated in Norse mythology, Icelandic horses are typically small and hardy.



ICELAND **Horse Course** Brought by Viking settlers some 1,000 years ago, Icelandic horses are coveted for their flowing manes, good temperaments, and graceful gaits. Walk, trot, gallop, and *tölt* (a natural gait unique to the breed) astride one of these beauties through the meadows, lava fields, and sandy beaches of Snæfellsnes Peninsula—all in the shadow of Snæfellsjökull, the glacier-capped cone volcano that inspired Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Refuel at simple country guesthouses, where hosts regale you with Viking sagas. Women only. **Adventure Women:** "Horseback Riding in Iceland: Land of Fire and Ice," 9 days; \$3,995; www.adventurewomen.com



THE SETTLER Ingólfur Arnarson (above) wasn't the first to reach Iceland, but he was the most prepared to endure its winter, becoming its first recognized permanent resident in the ninth century. Legend holds that as his boat neared land, he threw the pillars of his high seat overboard, bidding the god Thor to divine where he should live. The spot the pillars landed is known today as Reykjavík.

for a tour and refreshments. **Academic Arrangements Abroad:** "Sicily by Sea: Art Treasures and Ancient Temples," 9 days; \$5,995; www.arrangementsabroad.com **C N**

ITALY

Tour de Tuscany

Cycle past the rolling vineyards of Chianti and up the crete—clay hills—on the approach to Siena on this luxurious biking tour through Tuscany's legendary landscape. Picnic at private estates and stay at five-star digs (Siena's 17th-century Grand Hotel Continental, for example). Opt for an electric bike (\$400 extra) to save face on those climbs and focus on the countryside vistas rather than the burning in your quads. **Butterfield and Robinson:** "Tuscany Biking," 6 days; \$5,295; www.butterfield.com

IRELAND

Green Isle Road Trip

This coastal ramble has your small group cruising the southwestern countryside in custom 4x4s, with stops at quintessential Irish towns like Dingle (population: 2,500; pubs: 50) and a night at a castle in Connemara. The country's trademark breakfast (rashers and sausage) is included, but

unlike most of the trips featured here, lunch and dinner are not. Want to track down your Irish kin? Ask about private ancestral tours pegged to Ireland's 2013 diaspora celebration, called the Gathering. **Vagabond Adventure Tours of Ireland:** "Wild Irish Rover," 8 days; \$1,804; www.vagabond.ie **V**

AUSTRIA, CZECH REPUBLIC

Art Walk

An art historian provides the narrative during daily hiking jaunts. There are long nature walks, such as the one through the Palava hills reserve, samplings of Czech beer and Moravian wine, and tours of Prague and the beautifully preserved city of Český Krumlov, a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its baroque and Gothic architecture. **The Wayfarers:** "Vienna to Prague," 8 days; \$4,195; www.thewayfarers.com

SWEDEN

Scandinavian Respite

What better way to reconnect with your family than to build and pilot a timber raft down a river together, like the loggers of yore? In the wilds of Sweden, no less. Ditch your devices and float down the Klarälven River, a historic logging route, for five days. Your

kids will thank you now and later. **Greenloons:** "Swedish Timber Raft Adventure," 5 days; \$1,805, \$1,440 kids; www.greenloons.com **F V**

ALBANIA, KOSOVO, MONTENEGRO

Balkan Friendship Hike

Created by linking time-worn shepherd paths, the newly established Peaks of the Balkans trail system has opened to hikers the rugged Prokletije range at the nexus of Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Here's a chance to experience this remote, unspoiled region with its unique Ottoman-influenced culture. Nights are spent at guesthouses, whose owners serve up local fare and stories. **ROW Adventures:** "Peaks of the Balkans: Peace Park Hike," 10 days; \$2,490; www.rowadventures.com **N V**

UKRAINE

The Cream of Crimea

Once the fashionable haunt of the Russian tsars, the Crimean Peninsula is being rediscovered by travelers. This itinerary hits all the high notes: a private tour of the Anton Chekhov Museum and dacha, cooking and sharing a meal with descendants of the Tatars, and a VIP tasting at the storied Massandra vineyards. **Exeter International:** "Treasures of

the Crimea, Ukraine," 6 days; \$5,325; www.exeterinternational.com **N**

TURKEY

Youngsters' Delight

This family-focused journey is crammed with classic Turkish experiences—e.g., bargaining at Istanbul's spice market, visiting a rug-weaving co-op, and sailing on a *gulet*—plus hands-on fun like traditional paper-marbling, an art form that dates from the 15th century, and a pottery workshop in Cappadocia. Nice touch: Prior to the trip, kids are connected with pen pals they'll meet once they arrive. **Thomson Family Adventures:** "Wonders of Turkey: A Smithsonian Family Adventure," 15 days; \$7,090; \$6,940 for children under 12; www.familyadventures.com **F**

FRANCE

Unsung Europe

Rambling countryside, medieval stone villages, engaging locals, and castles galore—the southwest of France is arguably one of the least spoiled corners of western Europe, and an unparalleled backdrop for cycling. Pedal some 40 miles a day on the back roads of Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, and Languedoc-Roussillon, stopping for wine tastings, a canoe paddle down the Dordogne, and cassoulet, sans guilt. **Ciclismo Classico:** "Bike Across France," 10 days; \$5,395; www.ciclismoclassico.com **N**

PACIFIC ISLANDS & OCEANIA

SOUTH GEORGIA ISLAND

Shackleton Quest

Crammed with mountains, glaciers, and penguins, this stark place can seem more like the Antarctic than Antarctica itself, say those who've been to both. The Anglo-Irish polar explorer Ernest Shackleton landed here in 1916 after sailing 800 treacherous miles in an open boat, only to trudge across the island in a bid for safety. Retrace his journey, by ski and sleigh, from King Haakon Bay up the Murray Snowfield, over the spine of the Trident Ridge to Crean Glacier,



Český Krumlov, in the Czech Republic.

TICOR BOZANAR/COBBIS



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Yellowstone National Park

In the French Polynesian waters near Manihi, life abounds, including this antler coral.



CHILE, FRENCH POLYNESIA **Island Hopper** From 1772 to 1775, during his second expedition—a fruitless bid to find the mythical Terra Australis—Captain James Cook cruised Polynesia on the H.M.S. *Resolution*. He stopped to chart Easter Island, the launching point for this voyage aboard the 114-passenger M.S. *Caledonian Sky*. The next few ports, in the Pitcairn Islands, recall another Royal Society foray some 15 years later, as the place settled by some of the mutineers of the H.M.S. *Bounty*. Meet some of their descendants before calling on the idyllic, if less storied, island of Mangareva and the Tuamotus archipelago for nature walks and snorkeling amid iridescent fish. **Wilderness Travel:** “*In the Wake of the Bounty: Easter Island to Tahiti aboard the M.S. Caledonian Sky*,” 19 days; \$11,495; www.wildernesstravel.com **N**

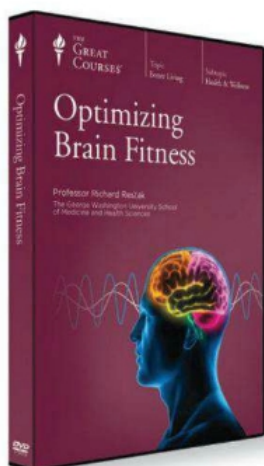


THE CAPTAIN
From merchant navy apprentice to Royal Navy captain, James Cook (1728-1779) commanded three historic voyages, during which he charted countless coastlines, claimed the eastern coast of Australia for Britain, circled Antarctica, and became the first known European to reach the Hawaiian Islands.

FRANCO BAIFFI/GETTY IMAGES (CORAL); HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/COMBIS (CAPTAIN COOK)

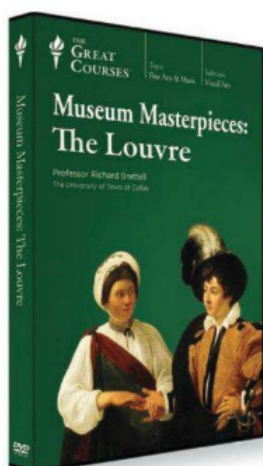


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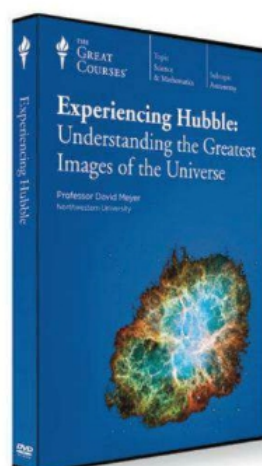
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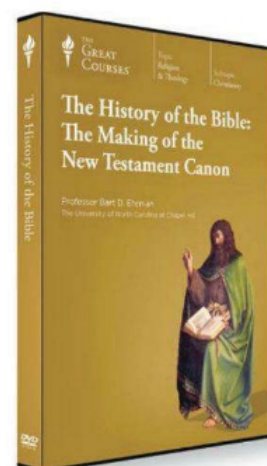
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Millions of monarch butterflies migrate to winter roosts in Mexico.



and over the final hump from Fortuna Bay to the remains of the Stromness whaling station. **Polar Explorers:** “*Shackleton Crossing of South Georgia Island*,” 17 days; \$18,350; www.polarexplorers.com **C**

NEW ZEALAND

The Shire and More

Some thrill-seekers never leave the South Island, but the less trod North Island has its

share of Kiwi magic, too. This multisport romp takes you mountain biking through the Whakarewarewa Forest and trekking the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Recoup with a soak in geothermal pools and a Maori feast cooked underground with hot stones. Finally, pay homage to that most beloved of explorers, Bilbo Baggins, with a visit to the set of *The Hobbit*. **Active New Zealand:** “*Kauri*,” 5

days; \$1,999; www.activenewzealand.com

NORTH AMERICA

CALIFORNIA

In Muir's Eyes

Despite pleas by John Muir, the Hetch Hetchy, a glacial valley in northwest Yosemite National Park, was clear-cut and flooded to be used as a reservoir in

the 1920s. One hundred years later, environmentalists continue to champion Muir's cause. This annual guided backpacking trip is a chance to chime in—participants must raise at least \$1,900—while experiencing parts of Yosemite unseen by most. **Restore Hetch Hetchy:** “*Muir's March, Yosemite National Park*,” 7 days, \$1,900 fundraising minimum; www.hetchhetchy.org/muirsmarch **V**

ALASKA

Into the Wild

Inspired by the life and work of naturalist Dick Proenneke, who lived alone in a cabin he built in Alaska's Twin Lakes region some 40 years ago, this hiking/kayaking/fly-fishing expedition in Lake Clark National Park shows off an Alaska few experience. A tour of Proenneke's homestead resonated with traveler Butch Roebuck: “The ranger allowed us to pick up and examine everything in Dick's cabin. It is more real when you can touch and feel.” But the high point was an evening spent with a herd of Dall sheep. “They were all around us. We just ate our dinner, watched these magnificent animals feed all around us, and dozed off to sleep in our bags.” **Arctic Odysseys/Alaskan Ventures:** “*Alaska's Twin Lakes: In the Footsteps of Dick Proenneke*,” 8 days; \$4,695; www.arcticodysseys.com

OREGON

Westward Ho

Millennia before Sacagawea and crew arrived in the Columbia River Gorge, its course was being altered by lava flows from hundreds of volcano eruptions, eventually orienting it east-west (unlike most of the world's canyons) and setting the stage for the Lewis and Clark party's epic odyssey to the Pacific and the country's western expansion. The region's geological and historical significance is palpable on this series of hikes in and around the gorge's summits, past dozens of towering waterfalls, awesome alpine vistas, and come spring, riotous wildflower displays. With stays at the Columbia River Inn and historic Timberline Lodge. **Timberline Tours:** “*Columbia River Gorge*,” 6 days; \$2,300; www.timbertours.com



THE SEEKER

The quiet heroics of Sacagawea no doubt kept the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804-1806) afloat, fed, and safe. The young Shoshone was the wife (and slave) of a fur trader hired as an interpreter for the enterprise. On her decision to stay with the party after serendipitously meeting her brother, head of a Shoshone band, author Margaret Talbot argues, “She, too, had been seized with curiosity about where the journey would take her.”

JOEL SARTORE/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK (BUTTERFLIES); BETTMANN/CORBIS (SACAGAWEA); SUSAN STUBERT (WATERFALL)

*Multnomah Falls
in Oregon, along the
scenic Columbia
River Gorge.*





ALASKA

In Harriman's Wake

The 100-passenger ship *Caledonian Sky* retraces part of railroad magnate Edward Harriman's landmark scientific expedition in 1899, including landings on the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands. Watch for walruses and arctic foxes on St. Matthew Island, and explore Little Diomedé—its Russian sister, Big Diomedé, is only three nautical miles away—whose Aleutian inhabitants still rely on subsistence hunting and gathering. **Zegrahm Expeditions:** “*Wild Alaska and the Bering Sea*,” 15 days; \$11,980; www.zegrahm.com **C**

CANADA

Active Challenge

With an eight-hour hike up Gros Morne Mountain and a one-day, 180-mile bike ride worthy of the Tour de France (your consolation is that prevailing winds are in your favor and a support van is never far behind), this bike/hike adventure along the so-called Viking Trail through Newfoundland's Gros Morne National Park isn't for the meek. Grit and sweat pay off in fjords reminiscent of Norway, warm Newfie hospitality, and a visit to L'Anse aux Meadows, where the Vikings landed at least five centuries before Columbus. **Freewheeling Adventures:** “*Viking Bike and*

Hike,” 7 days; \$2,695; www.freewheeling.ca **A**

MICHIGAN

Great Lakes Cycle

Largely unknown except for the regional visitors who have vacationed here for generations, northwest Michigan and the Upper Peninsula are stellar biking country, with gently rolling hills, historic waterside villages, and sweeping Great Lakes vistas. You'll have to carry your own gear on this circuit, but cozy inns await each evening. Beginners welcome. **Adventure Cycling Association:** “*Great Lakes, Inn-to-Inn*,” 11 days; \$2,149; www.adventurecycling.org **V**

MEXICO

Butterflies and Whales

During a few weeks in the winter, the migrations of monarch butterflies and eastern gray whales overlap in Mexico. Experience them both on this family-friendly field trip to the Michoacán highlands and Baja California. “I will never forget riding horseback up the steep trails with my kids into the mountains. At 10,000 feet elevation we were surrounded by fluttering wings,” said client Carolyn Holtzen. **Journey Mexico:** “*Magical Mexican Migrations—Pacific Whales and Highland Butterflies*,” 10 days; \$2,549; www.journey-mexico.com **N P F**



Machu Picchu is Peru's Inca icon extraordinaire.

PERU **Temple Run** Marathon mania has spilled over into mainstream adventure travel, spawning running-focused trips around the world, including this twist on the classic Inca Trail trek. Runners tackle the ancient Andes route in two days, from the Urubamba Valley, through the “Pass of the Dead Woman” at 13,780 feet, and into the cloud forest to the Intipunku “Gateway of the Sun” at 8,923 feet, where they’ll get their first eyeful of Machu Picchu in its full splendor. Trip veteran Joshua Price calls the experience “challenging, but incredible.” The big event is sandwiched between acclimatization runs, stints in the cities of Cusco and Lima, and a day spent touring the ruins. **Andes Adventures:** “*Inca Trail to Machu Picchu Running Adventure*,” 9 days; \$2,795; www.andesadventures.com **A**



THE PROFESSOR
A lecturer in South American history at Yale, Hiram Bingham (1875-1956) became fascinated with lost Inca cities after exploring Choquequirao in southern Peru in 1909. Though counterclaims of discovery have emerged, he’s largely credited with bringing the granddaddy of them all—Machu Picchu—to the world’s attention in 1911.

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS **Treasure Trove**

Most visitors experience the Virgin Islands from the deck of a cruise ship or yacht, and from this vantage point, the isles’ nuances can be easily overlooked. But the Caribbean’s calm seas here cry out for kayaking. This five-day paddle explores Norman Island—allegedly the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic *Treasure Island*—the uninhabited Sandy Cay and Sandy Spit, and Peter Island, where you’ll camp under the stars. **Arawak Expeditions:** “*Sea Kayaking in the Virgin Islands*,” 5 days; \$1,295; www.arawakexp.com **V**

U.S., CANADA (PLUS MALAYSIA, CHINA, SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN) **Call of the Sea**

Hopping a freighter to circumnavigate the globe may sound romantic, but consider that typical cruise amenities are few (no casino or evening shows), digs are no-frills, and Internet service is limited. Still on board? Have two months to kill? This is the adventure for you. Leave New York aboard the freighters *Figaro*, *La Scala*, or *Tosca*, and cruise eastbound via the Suez Canal, finally arriving in Vancouver. **Maris Freighter Cruises:** “*Short Around-the-World Cruise*,” 62 days; \$6,475; www.freighter-cruises.com **C**

CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

TRINIDAD, VENEZUELA, GUYANA, PANAMA

King’s Road

First forged by Indians and later cobblestoned by the Spanish in the 1500s to move Inca gold to galleons bound for Spain, El Camino Real connects the Pacific and Atlantic 50 miles across the Isthmus of Panama. Hike what remains of the rugged trail through Chagres National Park, home to jaguars, spider monkeys, and anteaters. Thanks to multiple river hikes, expect to be soggy for a good part of the day. **Ancon Expeditions of**

Panama: “*Camino Real Trek*,” 8 days; \$1,600; www.ancon-expeditions.com **A V**

CHILE

Patagonian Sip and Bike

Wine-tasting pairs with easy-going biking in the Casablanca and San Antonio valleys. Then the action moves to the Lake District and northern Patagonia for white-knuckle white-water rafting on the Petrohué River, a hike around the base of the snowcapped Osorno Volcano, and a traditional lamb barbecue hosted by local gauchos. **Santiago Adventures:** “*Bikes, Wine and Patagonia*,” 8 days; \$3,290; www.santiago-adventures.com **P**



The colonial city of Salvador, in Brazil.

BRAZIL

Trifecta Trek

This unusual walking-focused itinerary spans three distinct parts of Brazil: the Royal Route, which connected the gold mines of the interior to the coast during Portuguese rule; colonial Salvador, coined “the capital of happiness,” thanks to its laid-back residents and lively carnival; and the otherworldly cliffs, monoliths, and caves of Chapada Diamantina National Park. **Country Walkers:** “Brazil: Royal Route, Salvador, and Chapada Diamantina,” 11 days; \$6,498; www.countrywalkers.com **N P**

NICARAGUA

For the Birds

For all the buzz touting it as the next Costa Rica, Nicaragua has yet to attract mainstream tourists in droves. But this itinerary shows off its potential as a nature nirvana, with visits to five wildlife reserves, including Selva Negra (a combination organic farm, eco-lodge, and

bird-friendly coffee estate). Bonus: Birders have a shot at spotting and cataloging any new species to help create the country’s first bird book. **International Expeditions:** “Nicaragua: Land of Lakes and Volcanoes,” 9 days; \$3,398; www.ietravel.com **N**

ECUADOR

Homestay in the Amazon

The term “cultural immersion” pops up a lot on travel company websites, but here’s the real deal. Spend four days living with a Quichua family in the Amazon jungle, where you’ll learn how to identify medicinal plants; make chicha, a fermented drink from cassava; and participate in a shaman healing ceremony. **G Adventures:** “Ecuador Jungle Local Living,” 7 days; \$499; www.gadventures.com **N V**

Contributing editor **MARGARET LOFTUS** has reported and written “Tours of a Lifetime” for the past eight years.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Our own *National Geographic Expeditions* specializes in creating trips—from Antarctica to Yellowstone—many developed and led by the Society’s researchers and explorers.

BELIZE

Reefs to Ruins

With 180 miles of coastline, the second longest barrier reef in the world, virgin rain forests, and Maya ruins crammed into a country roughly the size of New Jersey, Belize is an undersize country with oversize natural gifts. Here’s an itinerary that lets you experience it all. **National Geographic Adventures:** “Belize: Reefs, Rain Forests, and Ruins,” 10 days; \$4,195; www.nationalgeographicadventures.com

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, VENEZUELA, GUYANA, SURINAME, FRENCH GUIANA, BRAZIL, URUGUAY, ARGENTINA

South American Odyssey

Starting in Trinidad and skirting the eastern coastline of South America to Buenos Aires, this grand expedition on the 148-passenger *National Geographic Explorer*—a celebration of the National Geographic Society’s 125th anniversary—focuses on the region’s cultural heritage as well as flora and fauna. An army of experts (including Explorer-in-Residence Wade Davis and conservation biologist Thomas Lovejoy) is onboard to answer your questions. **National Geographic Expeditions:** “Epic South America,” 38 days; \$34,730; www.nationalgeographicexpeditions.com **N C**



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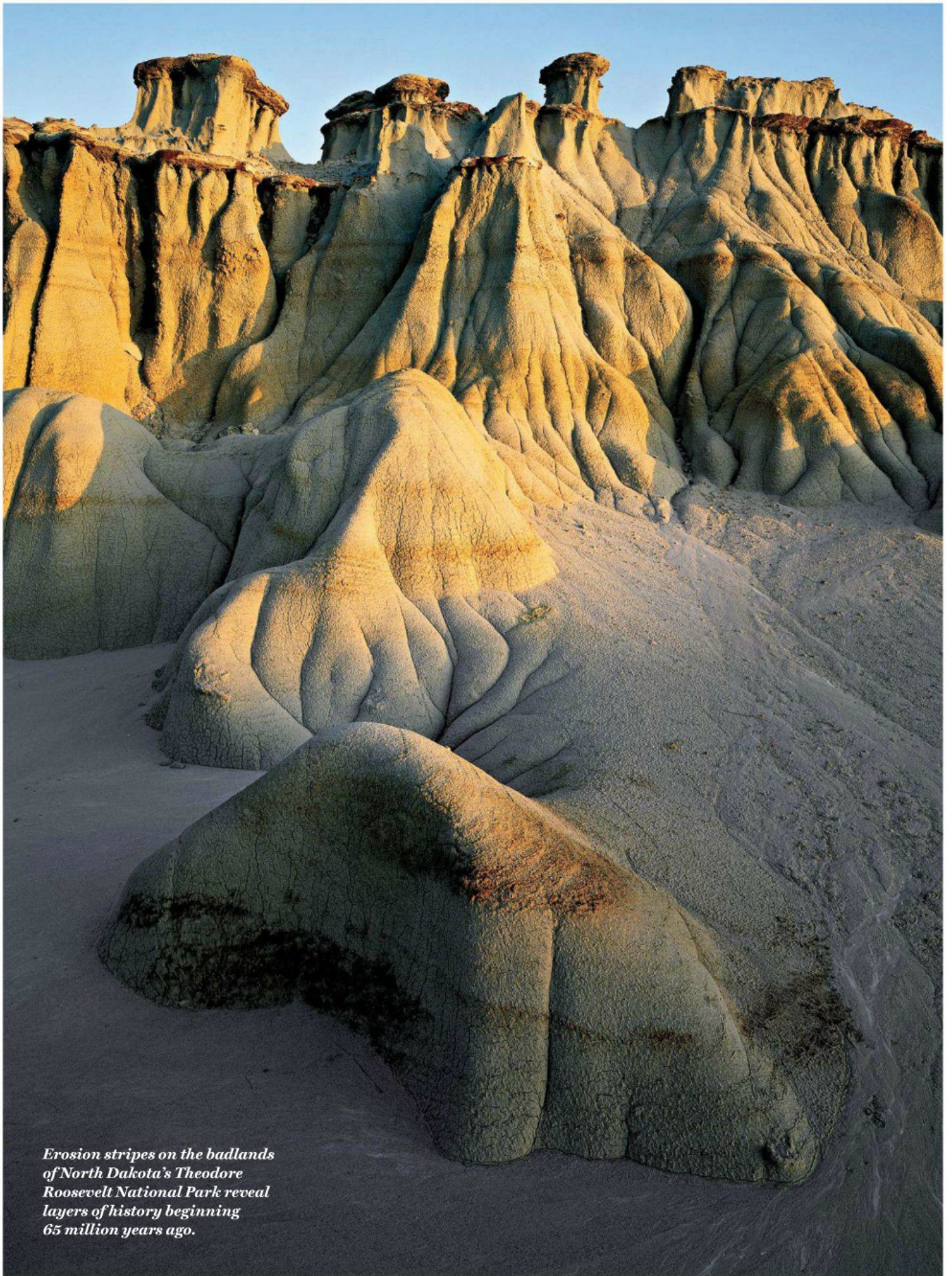


Road hogs: A motorcyclist and her dog pause for a herd of bison—a common traffic stopper in South Dakota's Custer State Park.

THE PLAINS?
HARDLY. A SOLO
DRIVE THROUGH
THE DAKOTAS
PROVES BIG ON
PERSONALITY

by JENNA SCHNUER

IN western South Dakota, a buffalo nibbles grass on the side of a road. One sight of the behemoth, its spindly legs supporting its bulk as if by magic, and I'm hooked. Three weeks into a drive from New Jersey to Alaska, on what I intended to be a quick detour into Custer State Park, a rush of giddiness takes the wheel. The West can wait. ¶ During my first full day at Custer, which turns out to be as grand and vast as a national park, I lap up its quiet. ¶ As I stand on the porch of my cabin in the Blue Bell campground, it's easy to pretend—save for



CARR CLIFTON/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK (FORMATIONS); DAVE WEAVER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REUTEX (MOTORCYCLES, PRECEDING PAGES)

Erosion stripes on the badlands of North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park reveal layers of history beginning 65 million years ago.

the shouts of the guys playing touch football across the campground and the sharp cracks from the campfire two cabins down—that there isn't anybody else here. I had spent the previous week catching up with a friend on the Dakotas' tourist circuit, namely Badlands National Park and Mount Rushmore. Days of chatter left me aching for the comfort of solitude. It seemed the perfect cue for a jaunt through the quiet side of the Dakotas, which I had long considered a place to see once and move on from, forever.

In the late afternoon, I set off from my cabin on Custer's fantastical Needles Highway. The 14-mile road winds around granite spikes that pierce the air and crosses through tunnels cut into the hills. Daylight's fading. I pull into a small parking area across from the Cathedral Spires trailhead, near six of the park's most stunning eroded towers. Hiking solo seems a bad idea, but I convince myself there's time for a short trip. A few steps in, a man walking a fluffy Pomeranian that looks more like a Madison Avenue shopping partner than a hiking companion cautions, "I wouldn't go too far. It's getting dark." His worry returns me to reality and, after I pass signs warning of rattlesnakes and step over downed trees that threaten to slide off the trail's steep bank, I turn back.

At the parking area, the man, his wife, and the dog linger next to two touring motorcycles, beasts that rival buffalo in size and, in these parts, domination of the land. I crave their story.

I ask the couple, Kirsten and Charlie Daye, if the pup enjoys riding. Taz—"as in the Tasmanian devil," says Kirsten—owns custom-made goggles and a rhinestone-encrusted helmet. He sits in a carrier behind Kirsten. When the weather is good, he pokes his head out. She slips the goggles over Taz's head and, just like that, he's transformed into a bad-to-the-bone bike dog.



PATRICK FILLIET/HEMIS/CORBIS (COWBOY), OCEAN/GOEBIS (ANIMALS)



The power of the prairie goes on display at Custer State Park in South Dakota: Cowboys (above) corral a herd of 1,300-plus buffalo at a festive annual roundup, and wild flocks of bighorn sheep (below)—their horns weighing up to 30 pounds—amble through the Black Hills.

THE NEXT DAY I head up U.S. 90 toward North Dakota. Just 70 miles from Custer, near Sturgis, famous for its annual motorcycle rally, I pull off at Bear Butte State Park. There's one other car in the parking lot, but as I start walking up the trail through the prairie grasses of Bear Mountain, I'm alone. Bear Butte could be the quietest place I've ever been. Prayer cloths flutter from tree branches, left behind by the Lakota, Cheyenne, and others who consider this land sacred. My cellphone rings and I cringe; I can't help but feel like an interloper. The sun's heat—overwhelming here—beats my energy down. I retreat to my car.

Back on the road, on U.S. 85, I'm in the midst of a drag race between the oil tank trucks rushing to pick up loads in northwest North Dakota, around Williston, ground zero of the controversial oil boom, where new fracking fields blaze so brightly they show up on NASA satellite images. When I tire of following one of the monsters—most stacked an impressive two tanks long—I crank the volume on my music, step on the gas, and swing into the lane of oncoming traffic. I lean forward, as though tipping my forehead toward the windshield will encourage my car to go faster.

The gold prairie against blue sky shines brilliantly. Though the Dakotas don't own the "Big Sky country" nickname, they're members of the club. The land seems to go on forever, too. The combination makes the buttes look like mere bumps on the flat vista rather than masses that, at times, stretch up into the sky more than 3,000 feet. Tears, unexpectedly soaking my cheeks, are the only response I can muster.

THE STILLNESS that settled down on me at Bear Butte holds for my first few days at Theodore Roosevelt National Park, named for the conservationist president who tested his mettle ranching cattle here as a young man. For the most part, I'm a solo act until a guy

The buttes look like mere bumps on the flat vista rather than masses that, at times, stretch up into the sky more than 3,000 feet.

shows up at my campsite's splintered picnic table. His earth-toned outfit camouflaged against the landscape, he looks like a birder.

"Did you see a map? I lost my map."

I'm well into finishing the day's third cup of camp-stove-brewed coffee. Less complete is my plan for the day. Hike the Petrified Forest loop? Or head to the prairie dog town? Behind me, the day's sun, already startlingly bright, lights up the badlands' buttes, ringed by horizontal bands colored coal black, brick red, and clay tan. Until this interruption I'd been pondering those buttes—and the sagebrush that's hiding, in my mind, a thousand rattlesnakes. The guy at the next campsite barely missed stepping on one yesterday.

In front of me, the man shifts his weight from foot to foot. He paces. He dances in place to an anxious tune.

"What map?" I ask.

It's the second time in five years that John, who introduces himself as an "unpaid botanist" from Vermont, has visited the park to explore—and document—the plant life. Over the years he has turned a store-bought map of the wilderness areas and hiking trails into a diary of the park's life, filled with notations of the cottonwood trees that grow along the Little Missouri River, the junipers that rise up from the north-facing sides of buttes, and the green and gold grasses—salt grass, western wheatgrass, bluestem—that thrive on a prairie where little rain falls.

"I'm very organized," John insists. Forgetting things on top of his car and driving off is his Achilles' heel. His sadness overwhelms him. Replacing that map won't be easy. He'll have to restart the project from scratch.

"You'll find it. I know you'll find it." The words feel like the truest thing I've said in weeks. "Years ago, somebody stole my bag and a notebook filled with my short stories," I tell him. "A man found the bag. I got it all back." If I can't hand him the map, I can at least try to peel off some of his worry. His pacing slows. He gives me his address and hurries off to resume the search.

Twenty minutes into my hike in the Petrified Forest, I'm trying to make sense of a different map, a photocopied trail guide I'd picked up at the visitors center. The sound of approaching footsteps throws me off. Aside from a sprinkling of spring wildflowers, little other life shows its face out here.

A man in shorts and a bright green T-shirt, a ponytail hanging

down his back and a small water bottle in his hand, runs up. He's dressed as if he's out for a jog through the suburbs.

I hate that I feel nervous, but nobody knows I'm here. We exchange hellos and names. I keep my distance.

"Is that a map of the trail?" Joseph doesn't have one. I'm still trying to figure out which path to venture down, so I take a few steps toward him, albeit reluctantly.

Joseph must sense my discomfort. He starts sharing his story. He's director of the University of North Dakota's Native Americans Into Law program and getting married soon. "I need to get in shape for the wedding pictures," he explains. I have a feeling my appearance on the trail surprised him just as much as his did me.

As we walk, sunburn prickles my skin. The glare is exhausting. I'm glad for Joseph's company. Trusting a stranger suddenly strikes me as a far smarter move than the solo hike I'd planned.

The trail cuts through more grasslands, then shoots us down a slope of dry cracked earth. A giant's market of mushroom-shaped rock formations greets us. Red caps several feet wide balance on tan stalks. It's an otherworldly place that calls for witnesses so, if nothing else, you know you're not hallucinating from the heat.

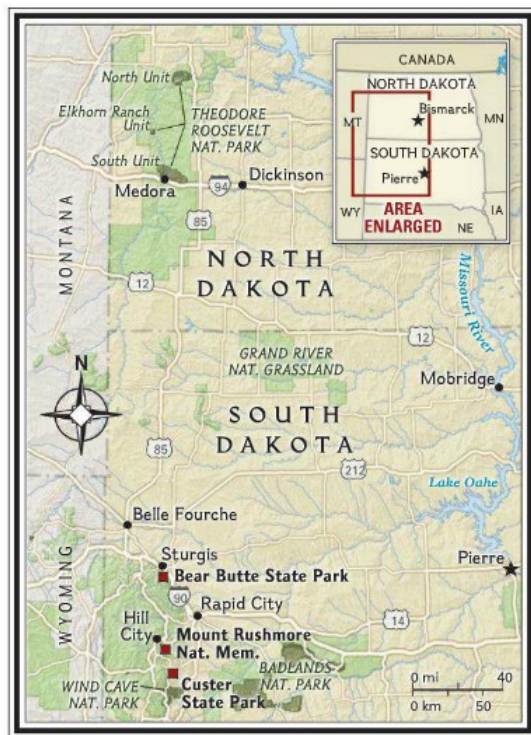
A few minutes later, we're hopping on and off petrified stumps. We point out signs of new life growing from cracks in the long-dead trees. We pop up short hills to take the long view, and, finally, turn back. At the mushrooms again, we swap smartphones and snap photos of each other posing underneath the giant caps, then part ways, friends.

Later, at my campsite, I notice I've received a picnic table delivery through the unofficial mail system of campgrounds—rocks and scrap paper.

It's from John. "Jenna, you were right. I have the map! Thank you for your assurance I would get the map returned."

The next morning, back in the driver's seat and bound for Montana, I can't stop grinning. Though the highways of the Dakotas helped form the outline of my new mental map, the kindred spirits along the way brought these states into sharp relief.

JENNA SCHNUER spent six and a half months driving cross-country last year—and is already planning a repeat trip this year.



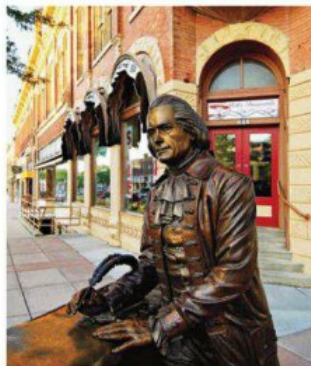
DAKOTA DIVERSIONS

Alpine Inn This old-school dinner spot in Hill City, South Dakota, serves a set menu of filet mignon, with a potato and an iceberg wedge on the side. The only decision: small or large cut of steak.

Tri-State Museum From an old printing press to rodeo spurs, relics of the region's pioneer days take center stage at this quirky museum in Belle Fourche, South Dakota, just north of Black Hills National Forest and near the Wyoming border. Also on-site is the Center of the Nation Monument, located at the officially recognized geographic

center of the United States. (The actual spot is around 20 miles away on private property, behind fences and through fields.)

Rough Riders Hotel Right outside Theodore Roosevelt National Park, in Medora, North Dakota, this hotel was built in 1884 and, in 1903, rechristened Rough Riders for the famed cavalry. Guests rest easy thanks to a modern renovation that retained Dakotas authenticity, from braised buffalo osso buco on the restaurant menu to Rooseveltian details such as a spectacled teddy bear in each room.



Rapid City Named for the creek that runs through it, this actually slow-paced South Dakota town near Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills invites strolls through its downtown populated with the statues of Thomas Jefferson (left) and 42 other U.S. presidents.

North Dakota Cowboy Hall of Fame This interpretive center in Medora salutes the state's rodeo and ranching culture and Native American heritage. Badlands fossils are also on display, including a full skeleton of a *Mesohippus*, an ancestor of the horse.

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19. LEAVENWORTH, WA - 509-548-5807

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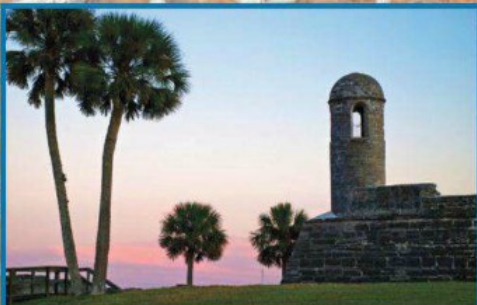
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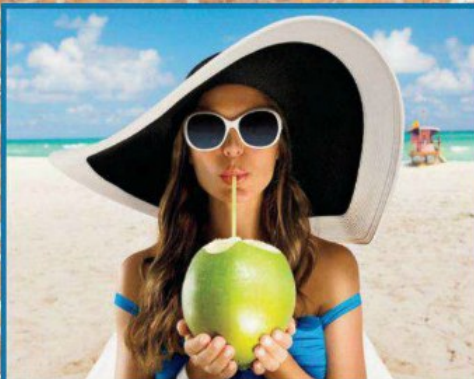


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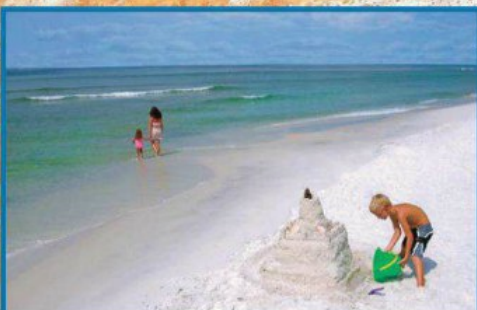


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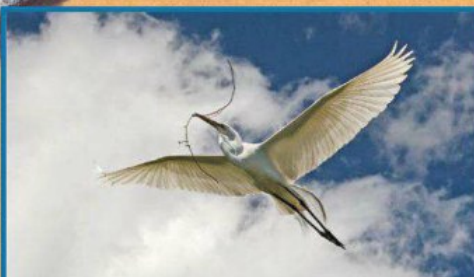
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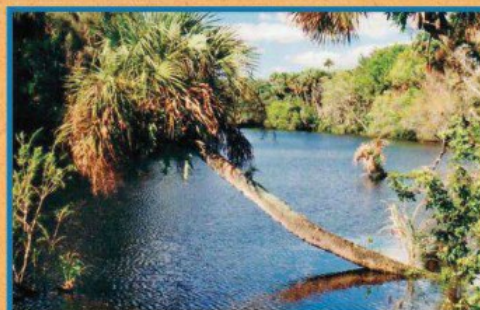
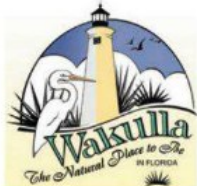
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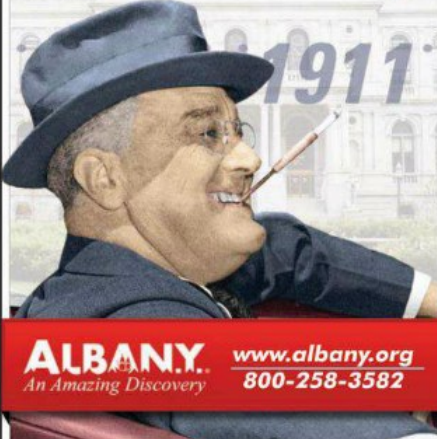


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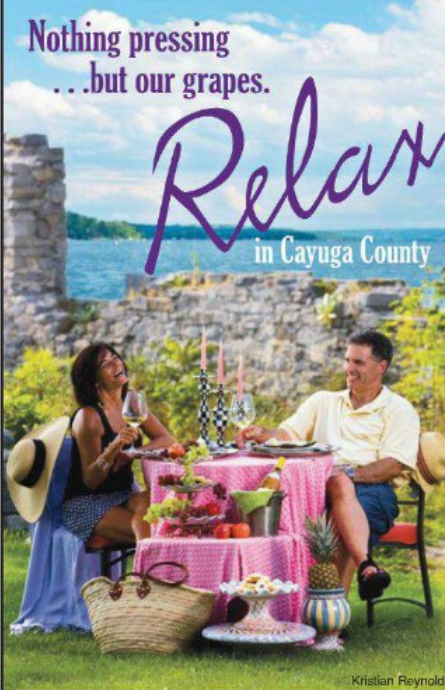


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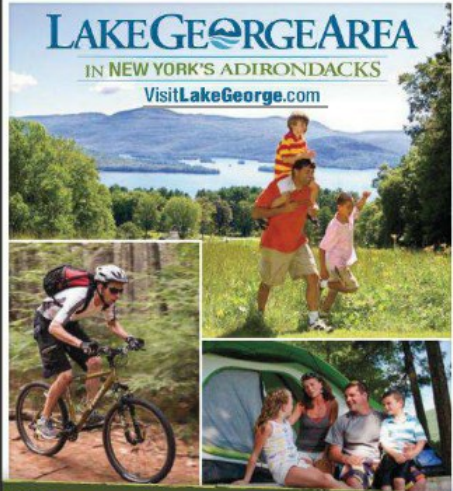


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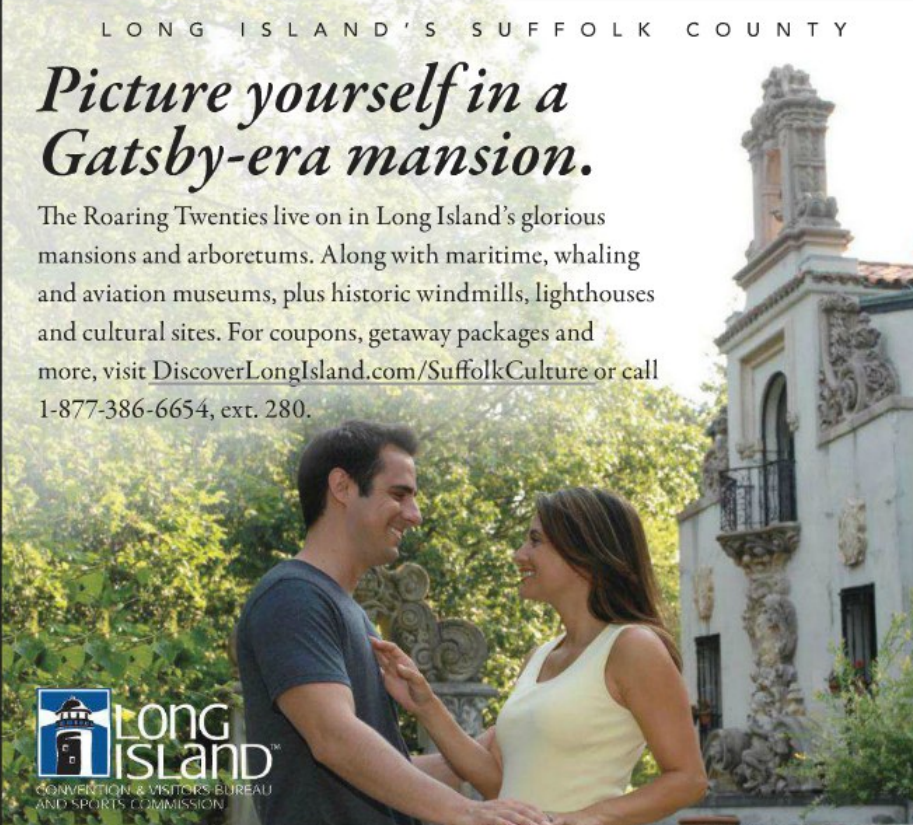
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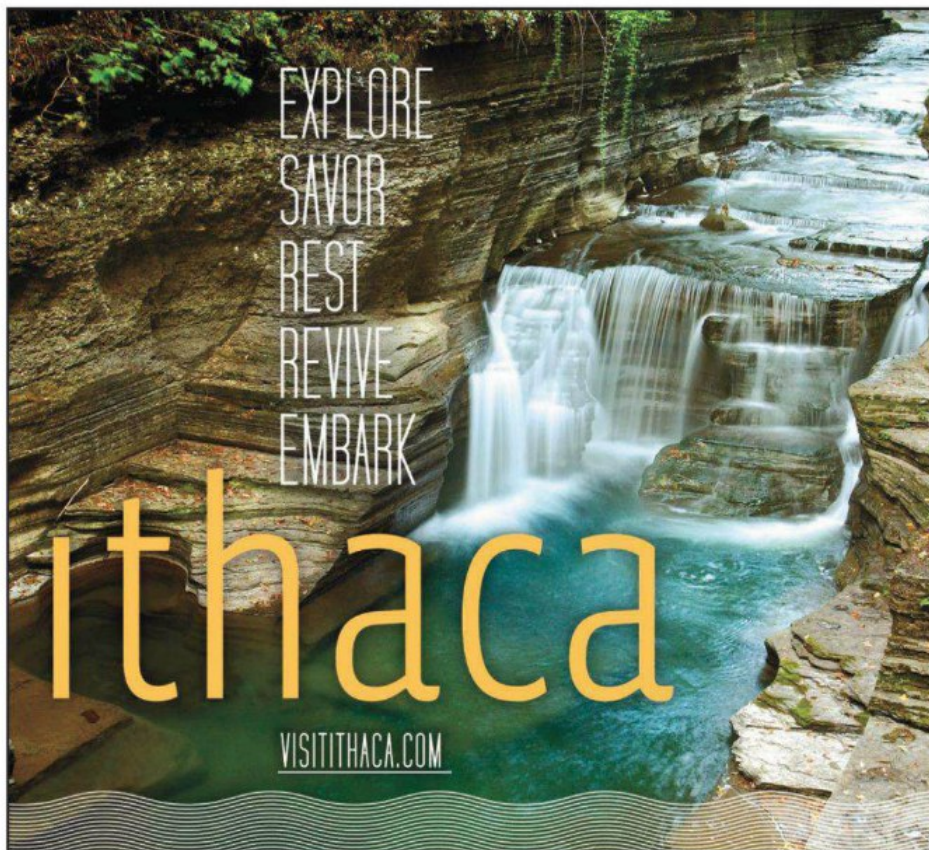
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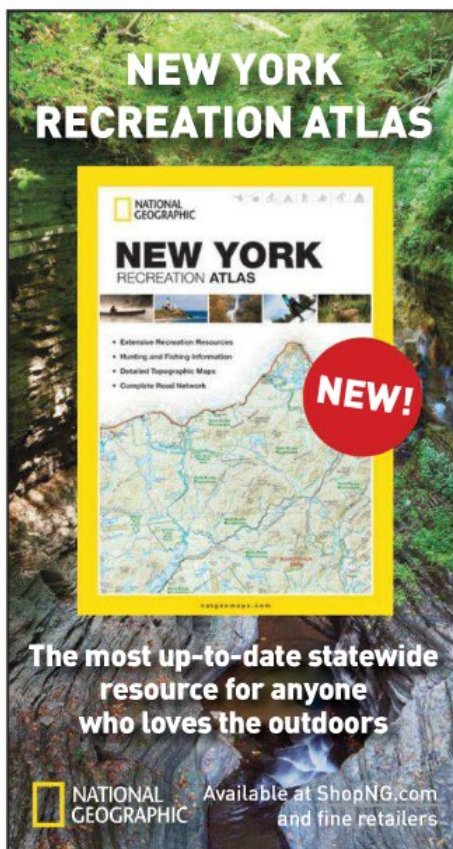
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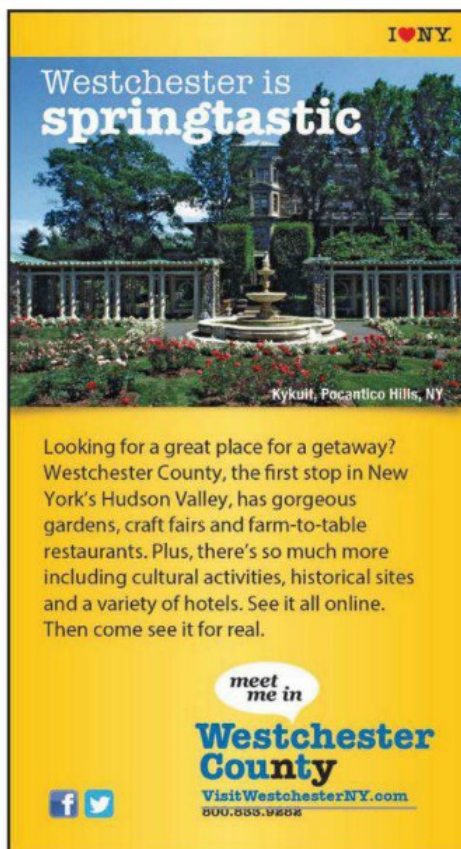
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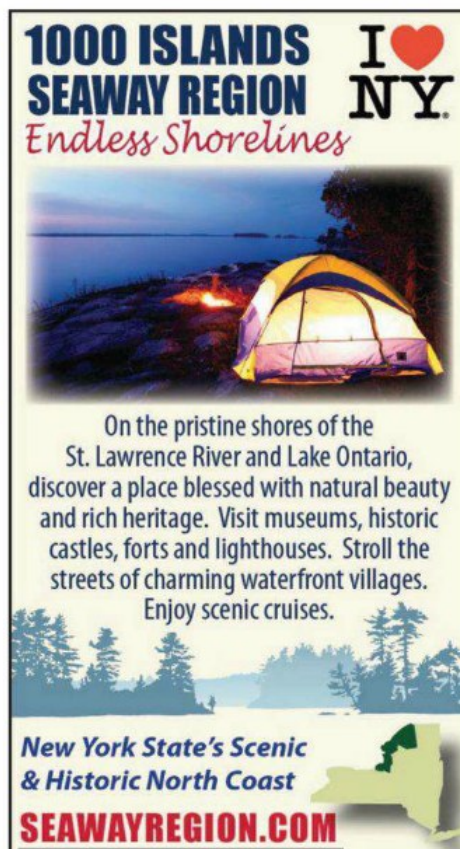
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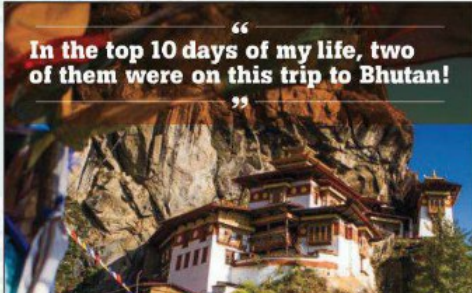


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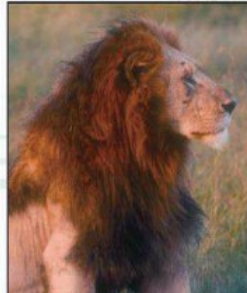
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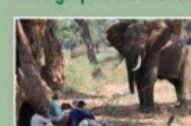


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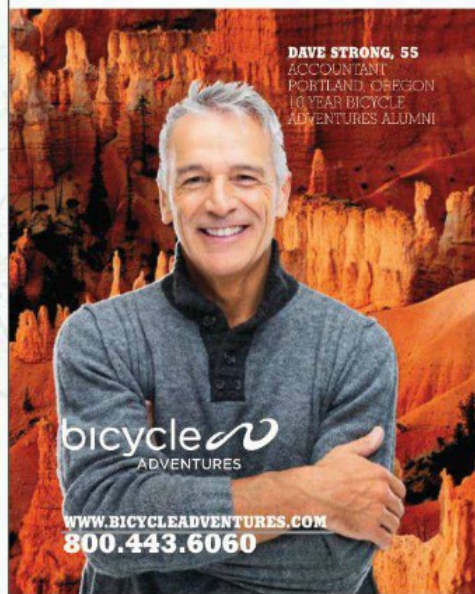
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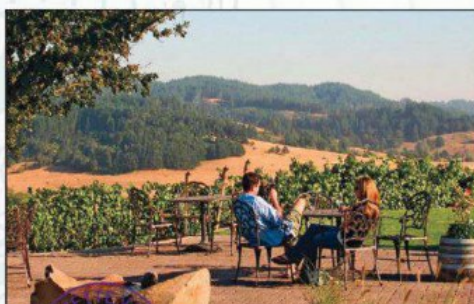
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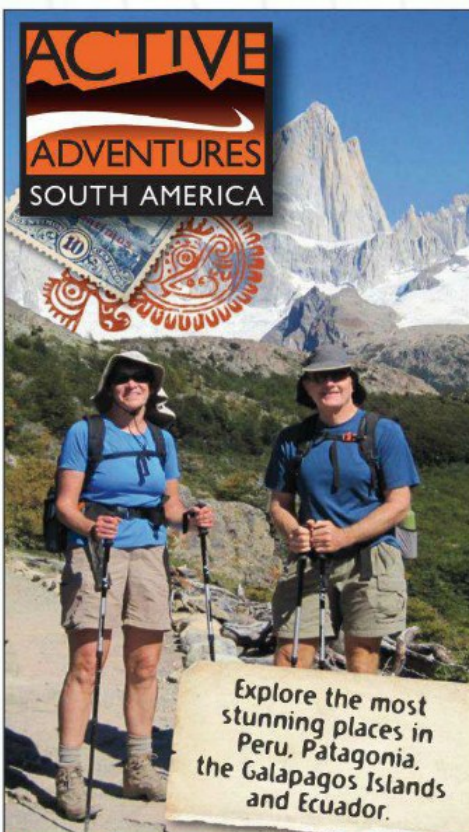


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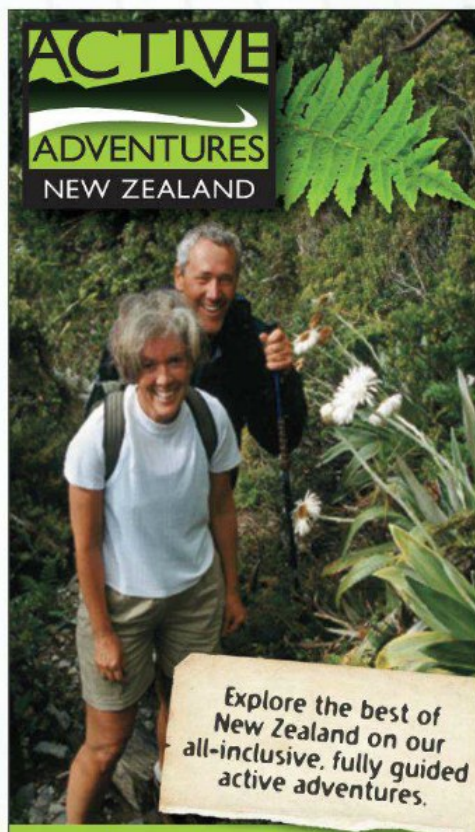
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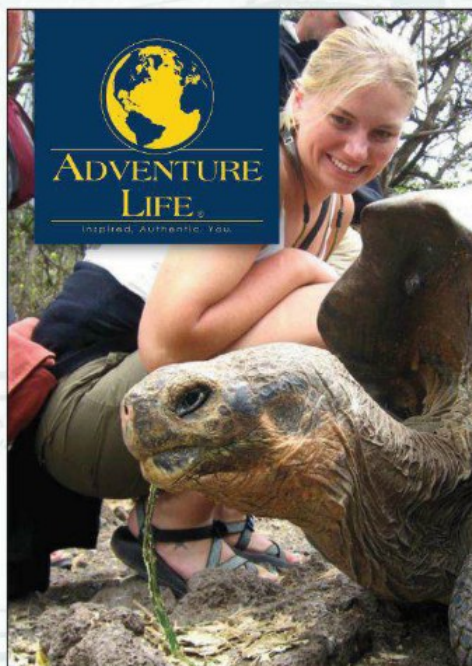


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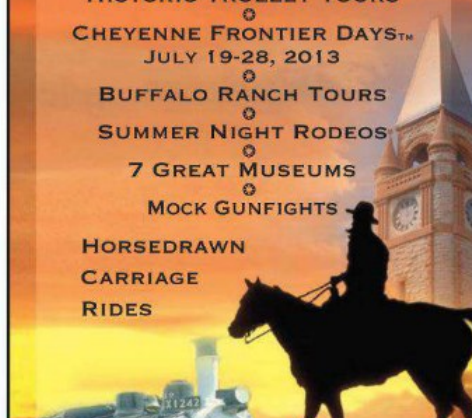
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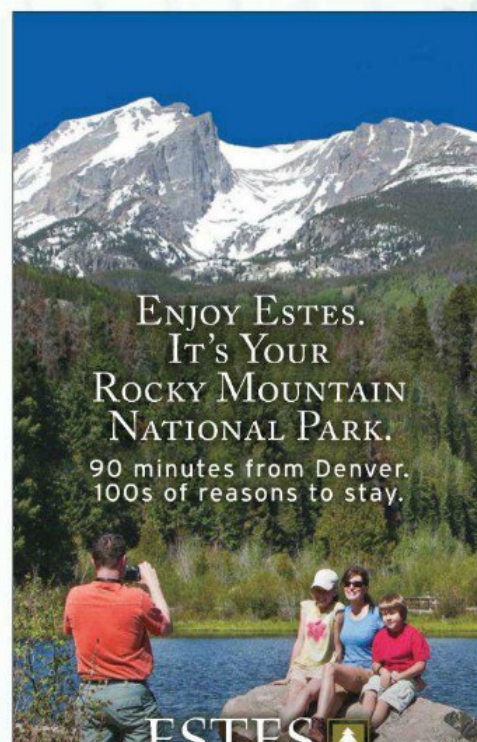
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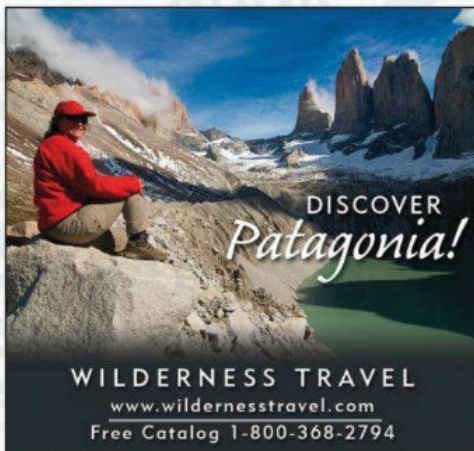


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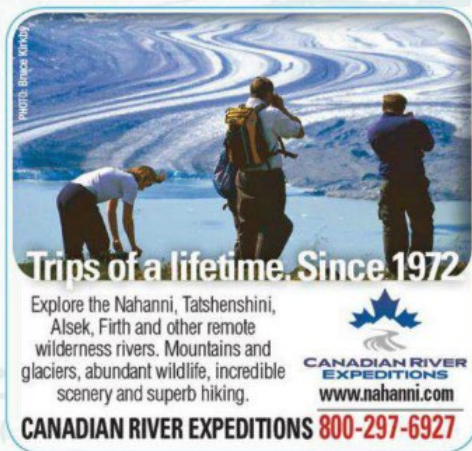
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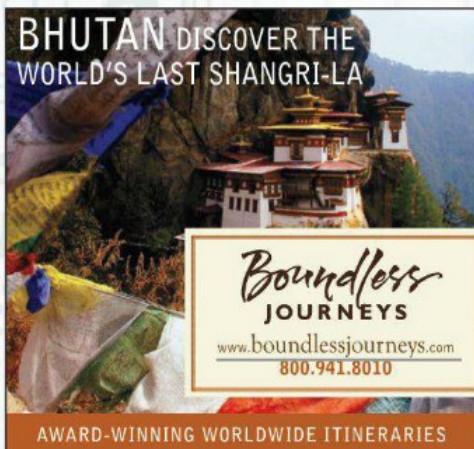
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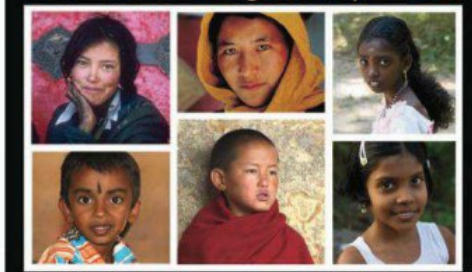
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Sydney Opera House

THE BILLOWING Opera House was a gamble when it started. Literally. Costs were estimated at \$7 million, but the building's final price tag came to \$102 million, with the money coming mostly from the State Lottery. And the punters who paid for it had to wait to hear the fat lady sing—the construction, estimated to take four years when it began in 1959, took 14. The final result was worth waiting for. Today, millions of tourists flock to the Opera House annually, photographing its gleaming roof (the shape of full sails enhanced by 1,056,006 white ceramic tiles) and marveling at the wonder Down Under. —ANDREW NELSON

NICE PIPES Number of pipes in the building's grand organ: 10,154.

DANISH MODERN Architect Jørn Utzon won the design competition in 1957. Judge Eero Saarinen described the Dane's plans as "genius."

WHAT'S IN A NAME? The Aborigines called the promontory on which the Opera House was built Tubowgule, or "meeting of the waters." The settlers called it Bennelong Point in honor of Woollarawarre Bennelong, one of the first indigenous Australians to visit England.



REPEAT ENGAGEMENT Queen Elizabeth dedicated the building on October 20, 1973, and has visited four times (above).

PUMPED IRON In 1980 Arnold Schwarzenegger won the "Mr. Olympia" bodybuilding contest held in the Concert Hall.

SEVEN HEAVEN The Opera House hosts 1,800 performances a year at seven venues. The Concert Hall, with its grand organ, is renowned for its acoustics.

CABLE STABLE Construction included laying 217 miles of cable. Placed end to end, the cable would stretch to the capital city of Canberra.

LIGHTEN UP Some 15,500 lightbulbs are changed annually. Workers are gradually replacing old bulbs with an eco-friendlier versions.

CROON WITH A VIEW African-American opera singer Paul

QUIZZABLE

What celeb tweeted Australian fans, urging them to come to the building for a dance-off?

- a) Oprah Winfrey
- b) Ellen DeGeneres
- c) Katie Couric

The winners received airfare and tickets to her show.
Answer: b

Robeson was the first person to perform at the Sydney Opera House. In 1960, the baritone got up on the scaffolding and sang "Ol' Man River" to the construction workers on their lunch hour.

WHODUNIT? The Opera House is the setting of mystery novel *Helga's Web*, by Jon Cleary. He put a body in the basement.

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